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# MEN AND LETTERS

# MEN & LETTERS

BY

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TO

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# MEN AND LETTERS

## THE CLASSICAL POEMS OF TENNYSON

The most superficial reader of Tennyson, if he has any knowledge of the classics himself, must be struck by the scholarship of the poet. Browning answered to Macaulay's definition of a scholar. He could read Plato with his feet on the fender. Tennyson, like Macaulay himself, was a great deal more than that. His honours at Cambridge were confined to the prize poem, which was English, which he afterwards regretted having written, and which some of his more zealous admirers declare to have been chosen by mistake. I do not know that Mr. Swinburne greatly distinguished himself in the schools at Oxford. Yet there are very few Ireland scholars who could have written the Greek elegiacs at the beginning of *Atalanta in Calydon*. But although, perhaps because, Tennyson never read hard for a classical examination, he could at any time have passed one. He was familiar with the niceties of scholarship, as well as with the masterpieces of literature; he was a competent and an interested critic of the Greek and Latin verse into which

his own poems were rendered; he could even appreciate that elaborate 'Olympian' which was 'rolled from out the ghost of Pindar in him' by Professor Jebb. It is not a peculiarity of Tennyson, but a characteristic of all scholars who are neither pedants nor sciolists, that he, and they, appear shallow to the shallow, and deep to the profound. What Swift said of books in general is especially true of the classics in particular. Many men treat them as they treat lords. They learn their titles, and then boast of their acquaintance.

Enthusiastic lovers of golf have been heard to justify their enthusiasm by alleging that their favourite game can be played from morning till night, from the first of January to the 31st of December, and from the schoolroom to the grave. The boy who loves Homer and Virgil makes friends for life. They are no fair weather companions. They remained with Tennyson till his death. They moulded and coloured his verse. 'I that loved thee since my days began,' he says of the 'Mantovano.' In his last volume, the aftermath of a glorious harvest, he returns to the old subject of Paris and Œnone. The half-century which rolled between the first Œnone and the second had not diminished the reverent affection of the author for the old names and characters, the forms more real than living man, nurslings of immortality. Quintus Calaber was not a sublime poet. He continued Homer neither well nor wisely. He is perhaps better known as Quintus Smyrnæus, and is scarcely worth knowing at all. Tennyson was the first to describe Œnone deserted by Paris, as Ariadne was deserted by Theseus, but with no Dionysus to console her. Everybody remembers the opening lines.

> There lies a vale in Ida, lovelier
> Than all the valleys of Ionian hills.

The swimming vapour slopes athwart the glen,
Puts forth an arm, and creeps from pine to pine,
And loiters, slowly drawn. On either hand
The lawns and meadow-edges, midway down,
Hang rich in flowers, and far below them roars
The long brook falling thro' the clov'n ravine
In cataract after cataract to the sea.
Behind the valley topmost Gargarus
Stands up and takes the morning : but in front
The gorges, opening wide apart, reveal
Troas and Ilion's column'd citadel,
The crown of Troas.

The Shakespearean 'takes the morning' was probably intended to suggest the flowers which 'take the winds of March with beauty' in *A Winter's Tale*. The cataract re-appears in the posthumous poem, or rather in the dedication of it to the Master of Balliol.*

Hear my cataract's
Downward thunder in hollow and glen.

It was the judgment of Paris which, according to the legend, disturbed his married life with Œnone. The subject is as familiar to a certain class of Greek poets as Susannah and the Elders to a certain class of Italian painters. Its later developments may be found in some epigrams of the Greek Anthology not quoted in the admirable selection of Mr. Mackail. Tennyson's description of Aphrodite is a marvel of delicacy and refinement. She is the Uranian, not the Pandemic goddess.

Idalian Aphrodite, beautiful,
Fresh as the foam, new-bathed in Paphian wells,
With rosy slender fingers, backward drew
From her warm brows and bosom her deep hair
Ambrosial, golden round her lucid throat
And shoulders : from the violets her light foot
Shone rosy-white, and o'er her rounded form,
Between the shadows of the vine-bunches,
Floated the glowing sunlights, as she moved.

* Mr. Jowett.

M. Taine considers that Tennyson could not have been a great poet, because he was a respectable man, so unlike Alfred De Musset. M. Taine might have been acquainted with an English imitator of De Musset, who would have equally disturbed his critical equilibrium. Probably the most hackneyed lines in *Œnone* are two which Tennyson altered, not, as I venture to think, and as I have the authority of Lord Coleridge in thinking, for the better.

> Self-reverence, self-knowledge, self-control,
> These three alone lead men to sovereign power.

So Pallas is now made to express herself, and one cannot quite say that the anachronism is as glaring as when in *Troilus and Cressida* Hector quotes Aristotle at the siege of Troy. But what Pallas used to say was—

> Self-reverence, self-knowledge, self-control,
> Are the three hinges of the gate of life.

Why Tennyson rejected that noble and simple line one would like to know. What he would have said if anybody else had suggested the emendation, one may easily conjecture. Yet he did not always neglect the remarks of irresponsible, indolent reviewers. Iphigenia, in *A Dream of Fair Women*, originally described her own fate in the following words—

> One drew a sharp knife through my tender throat,
> Slowly, and nothing more.

'What more did she want?' asked a flippant and irreverent critic. Tennyson felt the difficulty of answering that question. He gave it up, and wrote the present version:

> The bright death quivered at the victim's throat;
> Touched; and I knew no more.

In Euripides, or what has come down to us as

Euripides, the priest is about to perform the operation when a deer is miraculously substituted for Iphigenia, who mysteriously disappears and is removed by Artemis to Tauri, in the Chersonese, the modern Balaclava. But the last hundred lines of the *Iphigenia in Aulis* are almost undoubtedly spurious. That Tennyson was a student of Euripides can be proved from his poems. It has been frequently and truly said that Euripides was the most human of the Greek dramatists. He was also the most political and the most modern. He was the special favourite of that brightest and manliest of scholars, Charles Fox. Macaulay lived to repent, so far at least as Euripides was concerned, of his paradox that tragedy is corrupted by eloquence, and comedy by wit. It was German pedantry misunderstanding Aristophanic humour that begot the idea of the inferiority of Euripides. Between Tennyson and Euripides there was the tie of restless and yet reverent speculation about the significance of life and the destiny of man. Both of them shocked the orthodoxy of their day, such as it was. In rebuking Euripides it spoke through the mouth of Aristophanes. In rebuking Tennyson it spoke through the mouth of Liddon.

> There lives more faith in honest doubt,
> Believe me, than in half the creeds.

was repugnant to the Canon of St. Paul's. The gospel according to the great comedian was not tolerant of such sentiments as the suggestion that life was death, and that what was called death was really life.

> τίς δ' οἶδεν εἰ ζῆν τοῦθ' ὃ κέκληται θανεῖν,
> τὸ ζῆν δὲ θνήσκειν ἐστί;—Fragment 830.

In *The Coming of Arthur* there is a passage describing the King's services to Cameliard, which seems to me thoroughly Euripidean both in style and substance.

> Then he drave
> The heathen, after, slew the beast, and felled
> The forest, letting in the sun.

It was the special mission of Heracles ἐξημερῶσαι γαῖαν, to civilise the land, and the record of Arthur's exploits recalls more than one of the labours of Heracles. 'The letting in of light on this choked land' is Mr. Browning's very free paraphrase of ἐξημερῶσαι γαῖαν.

'The Death of Œnone' represents Paris wounded by the poisoned arrow of Philoctetes, 'lame, crooked, reeling, livid,' but confident that his wife would keep her promise and exercise her power. The scene is thoroughly Tennysonian.

> 'Œnone, by thy love, which once was mine,
> Help! heal me! I am poison'd to the heart.'
> 'And I to mine,' she said. 'Adulterer,
> Go back to thine adulteress and die!'

Homer, curiously enough, makes only a single reference, and that a very indirect one, to the judgment of Paris. In the last book of the *Iliad* he describes the gods as pitying Hector for the indignities cast upon him by Achilles, whom Paris afterwards slew, and instigating Hermes to steal his body away. But Here and Athene joined Poseidon in his implacable hostility to the Trojans, because 'Alexander,' that is, Paris, 'rejected those goddesses when they came to him in the inner court, and preferred her who gratified his passions in so fatal a way.' It is to be observed that these divinities displayed their charms in strict seclusion, Paris being the only male spectator. The fatal gift was, of course, Helen, ἑλέναυς ἕλανδρος ἑλέπτολις, as Æschylus calls her, whose face it was that 'launched a thousand ships and burned the topless towers of Ilion,' whose form and features made the Trojans exclaim, when they saw her on the walls of Troy,

οὐ νέμεσις Τρῶας καὶ ἐϋκνήμιδας Ἀχαιοὺς
τοιῇδ' ἀμφὶ γυναικὶ πολὺν χρόνον ἄγλεα πάσχειν.

That is, perhaps, the finest compliment in all literature, and may be compared with the remarks which, according to Brantôme, were made upon Margaret of Valois by the Spanish soldiers of Don Juan. Œnone is not Homeric. Her marriage is too early for the *Iliad* to take account of it. Her death, like the death of Paris himself, is too late. The Gargarus of which Tennyson speaks in the earlier of the two poems is the Virgilian Gargara, a neuter plural.

Ipsa suas mirantur Gargara messes.

But Tennyson has authority for the singular, which occurs in the *Iliad*. He is not easily to be caught out in a classical blunder.

Mr. Churton Collins has treated exhaustively the interesting subject of Tennyson's indebtedness to former poets, especially the poets of Greece and Rome. But Tennyson's utterance was always a voice, never an echo. The lovely passage in the *Passing of Arthur* which describes

the island-valley of Avilion,
Where falls not hail, or rain, or any snow,
Nor ever wind blows loudly,

was obviously suggested by the prophecy of Proteus to Menelaus in the fourth book of the *Odyssey*, thus translated by Abraham Moore :—

Thee to the Elysian plains, earth's farthest end,
Where Rhadamanthus dwells, the gods shall send,
Where mortals easiest pass the careless hour.
No lingering winters there, nor snow, nor shower,
But Ocean, ever to refresh mankind,
Breathes the shrill spirit of the Western wind.

But perhaps Tennyson shines most brightly when he takes a few lines from a Greek or Roman author and

amplifies them into a poem. The *Lotos Eaters*, with its noble choric song, sprang, as Athene sprang from the head of Zeus, from these four verses in the earliest and the greatest among all works of travel and adventure:—

τῶν δ' ὅστις λωτοῖο φάγοι μελιηδέα καρπόν
οὐκέτ' ἀπαγγεῖλαι πάλιν ἤθελεν, οὐδὲ νέεσθαι·
ἀλλ' αὐτοῦ βούλοντο μετ' ἀνδράσι Λωτοφάγοισιν
λωτὸν ἐρεπτόμενοι μενέμεν, νόστου τε λαθέσθαι.

'But whosoever of them ate the honey-sweet fruit of the lotus was neither willing to bring me word again, nor to depart; nay, their desire was to remain there browsing on the lotus with the lotus-eaters themselves, forgetful of all return.'

The resources of Ulysses were not exhausted. He did not argue with his two susceptible friends. He seized them and put them under hatches, and carried them out of the reach of temptation without asking their leave. He left them no more leisure to reflect on those old faces of their infancy.

Heap'd over with a mound of grass,
Two handfuls of white dust, shut in an urn of brass.

This is surely one of Tennyson's most magical feats of poetical compression. Far more finely and completely than Horace's *pulvis et umbra sumus*, it expresses the idea of death common to Horace and to Homer. That, and the 'eyes grown dim with gazing on the pilot stars,' are gems as rich in lustre as they are perfect in form.

*Ulysses* is the contrast and counterpart of the *Lotos Eaters*. It is the glorification of enterprise and adventure. Its motto might be that wonderful line in the *Odyssey*—

πλεῖν ἐπὶ οἴνοπα πόντον ἐπ' ἀλλοθρόους ἀνθρώπους.

Like *Œnone*, or rather the two *Œnones*, it is not Homeric. The *Odyssey* leaves Ulysses in Ithaca at rest after so

many wanderings, at peace after so many wars. His companions had all perished. We have indeed an intimation of his death, inserted, like the death of Captain Shandy, out of its place and before its time. It is in the shape of a prophecy by Teiresias, who says that just before the end Ulysses will meet a man with a winnowing-fan on his shoulder, and that then his death will come to him, 'gently, very gently from the everlasting sea.' Teiresias only predicts one more event in the career of Ulysses after the slaughter of the suitors with which the *Odyssey* concludes. It is the discovery of a people who have no ships, are unacquainted with the sea, and eat no salt with their food. The familiar words in St. John's Revelation, 'There shall be no more sea,' seem to connect the symbol of the sea with the idea of separation, as it is so often connected in the literature of the ancient world. To Horace, perhaps even more than to Homer, it was the *oceanus dissociabilis*. An epitaph in the old churchyard of St. Pancras, now destroyed, which dated, I believe, from the seventeenth century, contained the line—

When death no more divides, as doth the sea.

Perhaps the last survival of this old faith in the pathlessness of the ocean was Lord Derby's offer to eat the first steamer which crossed the Atlantic. The prophecy of Teiresias is obscure. But there may be some plausibility in the suggestion that the famous traveller who, in the earlier editions of Tennyson's poem, 'had become a name for ever roaming with a hungry heart,' was to end his days as far as possible from the disturbing element on which he had passed so many of them. It is an odd coincidence that Tennyson in this, perhaps the most artistically perfect of all his

works, should have thus described the time of the new departure from Ithaca :—

> The lights begin to twinkle from the rocks :
> The long day wanes : the slow moon climbs : the deep
> Moans round with many voices.

For the twilight was the time when the Homeric mariner did not sail, if he could possibly help it. He started in the morning, and always endeavoured to find some landing-place for the night.

That Tennyson was indebted to Dante for the idea of *Ulysses* is sufficiently obvious. Dante shows no sympathy with 'the man of many shifts,' as Mr. Lang and Professor Butcher ambiguously describe their hero. His restlessness is treated as a crime, and he is licked in hell by a wandering flame. When he told Virgil the end of his career, and how he was wrecked under a huge mountain not foreseen by Teiresias, Virgil might consistently have disputed the accuracy of the narrative. It is not classical. The second journey of Ulysses was told, as set forth in Miss Jane Harrison's *Myths of the Odyssey*, by Eugammon of Cyrene. Eugammon is said to have lived in the sixth century before Christ, and to have borrowed from an earlier work by Musæus, whose existence, however, like William Tell's, is doubtful, called the *Thesprotis*. We have nothing of Eugammon's poem except some fragments preserved by the grammarian Proclus, who lived about six hundred years later. The *Thesprotis* is mentioned by Pausanias the antiquary, and by Clement the theologian. The schoolboy's desire to 'finish the story' is as old as most other things. Tennyson took a noble advantage of a simple and general curiosity. Nobody ever read through the *Odyssey* without feeling sorry when he came to the end, and wishing that there were at least

twelve more books. The *Odyssey* closes with the intervention of Athene, the 'patron saint' of Ulysses, to save the rebels of Ithaca from entire extermination at the hands of their insulted chief. But the reader feels that there must be fresh exploits in store for

> this gray spirit, yearning in desire
> To follow knowledge, like a sinking star,
> Beyond the utmost bound of human thought.

An interval of about twenty years elapsed between the publication of *Ulysses* and the publication of *Tithonus*. He must be a very acute and a very self-confident critic who would undertake to pronounce an authoritative judgment upon their respective merits. *Tithonus* was inspired by the Homeric Hymn to Aphrodite, which in style and genius it greatly excels. Even Mr. Gladstone, who holds manfully by the unity and common origin of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, does not, I think, suggest that the Homeric Hymns were written by Homer, or by another person of the same name. The prayer of Eôs (vulgarly called Aurora) for Tithonus is a melancholy example of 'ignorance in asking.' This beaming and radiant goddess became enamoured of Tithonus, and humanly speaking ran away with him. By way of a wedding present or portion to her husband she prayed Zeus to confer upon him the gift of immortality. Zeus consented as readily as George the Third when he was asked for an Irish peerage. He nodded and said it was all right, and the bride departed in the highest possible spirits. It was not the business of Zeus to remind her that she had forgotten the prayer against old age. She found she had married a Struldbrug—there can be no anachronism in the case of goddesses—and she did not like it. She took her own measures, and the later lot of Tithonus was not a happy one. The best of the

Homeric Hymns, the Hymn to Hermes, was admirably translated by Shelley. Tennyson took the situation as he found it in the Hymn to Aphrodite, and made out of it a glorious poem worth all the Homeric Hymns put together. The Hymn describes almost prosaically how Tithonus is constantly babbling in a weak, tremulous voice, and how the vigour which was once in his well-knit limbs has forsaken them. His wife tells him with unflinching frankness that if he had been like that she would not have chosen him to live for ever among the immortals, himself as immortal as them. Eôs would perhaps have improved on Donna Julia, and held that it was better to have four husbands of five-and-twenty than one of a hundred. It is not a pleasant nor a romantic picture. It contrasts very forcibly with the devotion of Penelope and her prayer.

μηδέ τι χείρονος ἀνδρὸς ἐϋφραίνοιμι νόημα.

She prays that she may never cheer the thought of a meaner man, but carry her reverence for Ulysses into the gloom of the nether world. Tennyson, with his delicacy, his purity, the magic of his genius, lifts us into a higher sphere than the Hymn's with

> Alas! for this gray shadow, once a man,
> So glorious in his beauty, and thy choice,
> Who madest him thy chosen, that he seem'd
> To his great heart none other than a god.
> I asked thee, 'Give me Immortality!'
> Then didst thou grant mine asking with a smile,
> Like wealthy men who care not how they give.
> But thy strong Hours indignant work'd their wills,
> And beat me down and marr'd and wasted me,
> And tho' they could not end me, left me maim'd,
> To dwell in presence of immortal youth,
> Immortal age beside immortal youth,
> And all I was in ashes.

If we want to get above that level, we must go to Homer himself, or to Shakespeare.

The influence of classical poetry may be traced almost everywhere in Tennyson. The exquisite quatrain in the *Palace of Art*—

> Or sweet Europa's mantle flew unclasp'd
> From off her shoulder backward borne,
> From one hand droop'd a crocus: one hand grasp'd
> The mild bull's golden horn—

is an echo of Moschus, the author of the famous lines—perhaps the finest in later Greek literature—paraphrased by Wordsworth in the beautiful After-thought to the Sonnets on the Duddon. The parallel between Moschus and Tennyson is illustrated in Mr. St. John Thackeray's *Greek Anthology*, a book with which a man might cheerfully face a desert island or a contested election.

After *Tithonus* comes *Lucretius*, the third poem of the classical triplet or trio so justly celebrated in English poetry. We know, if possible, less about the life of Lucretius than we know about the life of Shakespeare. The story that his wife, Lucilia, gave him a philtre which drove him mad, and that in his madness he destroyed himself, has been adopted by Tennyson. But it rests upon no earlier or better authority than St. Jerome's. The *De Rerum Naturâ*, as we have it, is unfinished. But it almost certainly remains as the author left it. It certainly contains no trace of insanity, and is incomparably the finest philosophical poem in the world, though the philosophy often gets in the way of the verse. I understand that the great men who write in *Mind* for an audience fit, though few, admit Lucretius to have been a real philosopher. He was undoubtedly a poet, a patriot, and a man who had tasted, like Jacques, the pleasures of life. He seems to have been haunted and beset by those sensuous and ignoble phantoms from which Sophocles in his old age rejoiced that he had

escaped. But they did not interfere with the vigour or the minuteness of his abstract speculations. Like Cicero and Catullus, and most contemporary men of letters, he hated Cæsar. Perhaps they detested him none the less cordially because he was as good a judge of literature as any of them. The *genus irritabile vatum* does not like a statesman and a man of the world who can turn phrases with a professional quill-driver. But whatever may be thought of the story which Tennyson has caught up, there cannot be two opinions about the intensely Lucretian character of his poem. Only a great poet, who was also a great scholar, could have so thoroughly penetrated the secret and so fully expressed the essence of those mighty and marvellous hexameters. The very rugged strength and majesty of lines compared with which Virgil seems almost tame even to Virgilians may be felt in such blank verse, at once bold and splendid, as—

> A riotous confluence of watercourses,
> Blanching and billowing in a hollow of it,

or the still more tremendous

> Ruining along the illimitable inane.

Only a consummate master of blank verse dares to write it in that fashion. The dreams of Lucretius are all suggested by passages of his own work, especially by the curious and unique analysis of love at the end of the fourth book. Lucretius was no Ovid. He abhorred licentiousness, at least in its grosser forms. But it besieged him, conflicting as it did with the plain living and high thinking taught and practised by his much-maligned master, Epicurus. He believed no more in an oread than Selden believed in a witch. But he could fancy

how the sun delights
To glance and shift about her slippery sides,
And rosy knees and supple roundedness,
And budded bosom-peaks.

Nothing, again, could be more Lucretian in tone and even in language than the denial of the sun's divinity or personality,

Since he never sware,
Except his wrath were wreak'd on wretched man,
That he would only shine among the dead
Hereafter; tales! for never yet on earth
Could dead flesh creep, or bits of roasting ox
Moan round the spit—nor knows he what he sees.

Or take again these verses on the Epicurean gods

who haunt
The lucid interspace of world and world,
Where never creeps a cloud or moves a wind.

Nor ever falls the least white star of snow,
Nor even lowest roll of thunder moans,
Nor sound of human sorrow mounts to mar
Their sacred everlasting calm.

This is an excellent paraphrase of

Apparet divum numen, sedesque quietæ,
Quas neque concutiunt venti nec nubila nimbis
Aspergunt, neque nix acri concreta pruinâ
Cana cadens violat, semperque innubilus æther
Integit, et large diffuso lumine rident.

But perhaps Tennyson's handling of his subject is most felicitous when he comes to deal with the famous invocation of Venus at the beginning of the *De Rerum Naturâ*. It has been objected that this introductory passage, with all its eloquence and grandeur, is inconsistent with the Epicurean doctrine, not that there are no gods, but that they are careless of mankind. In Tennyson Lucretius demands of Venus whether she is plaguing him because he sought to deprive her of the sacrifices offered her by her votaries,

> Forgetful how my rich procemion makes
> Thy glory fly along the Italian field
> In lays that will outlast thy deity.

Epicurus was neither an atheist nor a polytheist. He was rather what is now termed an agnostic. The Venus upon whom Lucretius called was not the heroine of the *Judgment of Paris*, nor the love-sick temptress of Adonis, but the spirit of Nature, the generative and recuperative principle, the universal mother. Yet there is an undertone of reference to the mistress of the God of War, whom he exhorts

> To kiss thy Mavors, roll thy tender arms
> Round him, and keep him from the lust of blood
> That makes a steaming slaughter-house of Rome.

The two best commentators on Lucretius are Tennyson and Munro.

It is natural to associate the stanzas to Virgil with the lines on Catullus, which are headed *Frater Ave atque Vale*. Yet they are very different in scope, in purpose, and in treatment. The history of the earlier poem—they were both afterwards included in the same volume—is instructive. It might, without much perversion of language, be called task work. For it was 'written at the request of the Mantuans for the nineteenth centenary of Virgil's death.' Yet in the truest sense it was a labour of love, as those responsible for the invitation must have known that it would be. 'I that loved thee since my day began' was no news to anyone acquainted with Virgil and with Tennyson. To call Tennyson an English Theocritus is to my mind critically unsound. To call him an English Virgil would be misleading without a good deal of qualification. But there would be more truth and point in the remark. Virgil's life was a comparatively short one. He never revised his tale of Troy. He did

not wish it to be published, even after his death. He was a modest man, as Tennyson used emphatically to say. But it would tax the most learned and accomplished of modern humanists to suggest what Virgil would have done to the *Æneid* before publication. There are some unfinished lines, and exceedingly deplorable efforts have been made by various commentators to complete them. These would of course have been rounded off. For the rest, one must have an instinct which would detect the Patavinity of Livy to perceive the roughness of the *Æneid* as compared with the *Georgics* or the *Eclogues*.

> All the chosen coin of fancy
> Flashing out from many a golden phrase

is as fully applicable to that 'ocean-roll of rhythm' which 'sounds for ever of Imperial Rome,' as to the

> Chanter of the Pollio, glorying
> In the blissful years again to be,
> Summers of the snakeless meadow,
> Unlaborious earth and oarless sea.

The justice and the nicety of Tennyson's critical faculty are shown in his preferring Virgil to Hesiod, but not to Theocritus nor to Homer.

> Landscape-lover, lord of language,
> More than he that sang the Works and Days.

Nothing of the same kind is said about the *Iliad* or the *Odyssey*, or those wonderful idylls which, unlike *Tithonus*, flourish not in immortal age, but in immortal youth. I am sometimes tempted to wish that Matthew Arnold had let Theocritus alone. So many people seem to think that Gorgo and Praxinoe are Theocritus. They might as well believe that Mrs. Quickly and Doll Tear-sheet are Shakspeare. I should think the rising generation must be getting rather tired of Calverley's English and Latin puns. His sympathetic rendering into ex-

cellent verse of the sweetest pastoral poet the world ever saw seems to be strangely neglected. Some superficial grumblers condemn Virgil because he is imitative, because, in fact, he came after Theocritus and Homer. 'A man should write his own English,' said a master of style. Virgil wrote his own Latin, though he was not ashamed of proving that he had read Lucretius. He had the same subtle power over his instrument as Paganini or Joachim. But he requires no defence. The late Professor Sellar showed, in a brilliant essay, that in all ages and in all countries men of every condition, class, and creed had found that Virgil expressed their inmost soul better than they could express it themselves. No Englishman should be indifferent to a writer who has been quoted by illustrious Englishmen in every crisis of modern history, by Walpole and Pulteney, by Carteret and Chatham, by Fox and Pitt, by Gladstone and Lowe, by the most eminent statesmen in

> the northern island,
> Sunder'd once from all the human race.
> Toto divisos orbe Britannos.

One of the most Tennysonian passages in Virgil is that perfect little picture of childish love at first sight which was the special favourite of Voltaire.

> Sæpibus in nostris parvam te roscida mala,
> Dux ego vester eram, vidi cum matre legentem.
> Alter ab undecimo tum me jam acceperat annus,
> Vix poteram ab terra fragiles contingere ramos :
> Ut vidi ! ut perii ! ut me malus abstulit error ! *

Virgil copied this sketch from the wooing of Polyphemus and Galatea in the Eleventh Idyll of Theocritus.

* 'I saw you with my mother in our garden when you were a little girl, picking apples with the dew on them. I had shown you the way. I was just twelve years old. I could scarcely reach the twigs from the ground to break them. How I looked at you ! how my heart stopped ! how I caught the madness, and what a dance it led me !'

But he amplified and improved it. Compare *The Miller's Daughter*.

> For you remember, you had set,
> That morning on the casement-edge,
> A long green box of mignonette,
> And you were leaning from the ledge:
> And when I raised my eyes, above
> They met with two so full and bright—
> Such eyes—I swear to you, my love,
> That these have never lost their light.

The nine beautiful verses entitled *Frater Ave atque Vale* are not the only tribute which Tennyson paid to Catullus. The hendecasyllables, 'O ye chorus of indolent reviewers,' are of course composed not only 'in a metre of Catullus,' but in Catullus's favourite metre. The galliambic rhythm of *Boadicea* is borrowed from one of the most magnificent of all Catullus's poems, the celebrated *Attis*, which the modern world admires and must admire in spite of its theme. I believe that if one wishes to be pedantic one calls these lines 'Ionics a Minore with an anacrusis.' The grief of Catullus for the death of his brother was deep, simple, and lasting. He could not keep it to himself. It broke out not only in the funeral hymn from which Tennyson took the concluding words for his title, but in other poems on other subjects, notably in the dedication to his friend Hortalus, probably Hortensius, of his translation from the *Hair of Berenice* by Callimachus. He there says that he loved his brother more than life, that, in the language of Tennyson, he 'loved him and loves him for ever.' He does not go on with Tennyson to declare that 'the dead are not dead but alive.' He asserts elsewhere the exact contrary. But his *te semper amabo* is emphatic, and scarcely Roman. 'Tenderest of Roman poets,' as Tennyson calls him, he was. Strictly speaking, perhaps, the praise is not high. Horace's ode on the death of

Quintilius is not really tender. It is partly the sham stoicism of an Epicurean and partly the sham religion of a materialist, or, in his own delightful euphemism, 'parcus deorum cultor et infrequens'—as we might say, one who seldom troubled the pew-openers. Catullus is a strange and interesting phenomenon. He was ruined by a woman, the Lesbia of his poems, the Clodia of history. He found out her true character only when, as Dr. Johnson says of Pope and Patty Blunt, it was too ate to transfer his confidence or his affection. He bewailed his weakness, and implored the assistance of Heaven to rescue him from the tyranny of a shameful love in verse which is but the more telling for the abrupt uncouthness of its pathos and its strength. His hold upon modern sentiment, if sentiment, or anything except 'the steamship and the railway,' can be modern, is chiefly due to his fraternal piety and to the singular affection with which he regarded his home.

Sweet Catullus's all but island olive-silvery Sirmio has been celebrated in immortal strains. Mr. Robinson Ellis considers that Catullus underrated Sirmio, which seems odd. He has certainly given it undying fame.

> So long as men can breathe, or eyes can see,
> So long lives this, and this gives life to thee.

"This" is the *O venusta Sirmio*, quoted by Tennyson, and the justly celebrated passage—

> O quid solutis est beatius curis?
> Cum mens onus reponit et peregrino
> Labore fessi venimus nostrum ad Larem.
> Desideratoque acquiescimus lecto?

'What is happier than release from care when the mind lays aside its burden, when, weary with the labour of travel, we have come to our own hearth, and rest in the bed for which we longed?'

Catullus is sometimes called the most original of the Latin poets. But he borrowed much from the Greeks, and several of his poems are mere translations. The models have almost wholly perished, except the famous Ode of Sappho, and there Catullus has risen nobly to the sublime height of that passionate outburst. Catullus's powers of satire and invective were so great that even Cæsar was afraid of them. But some of his shorter pieces are on a level with those *graffiti* at Pompeii which are judiciously concealed from the eyes of Mr. Cook's young friends.

Tennyson need not fear comparison with the scholarly poets who preceded him. Jonson and Milton were very learned men. Dryden was a good scholar, and may be thought to have achieved, at least once, when he translated the Twenty-ninth Ode of the third book of Horace, the feat of surpassing his own author. Samuel Johnson, a real poet at his best, knew Juvenal as well as Tennyson knew Lucretius. But not one of them, not even rare Ben himself, was more thoroughly imbued with the spirit of classical antiquity than the author of the *Lotos Eaters*. Milton is sometimes the servant rather than the master of his learning. He was not unfrequently, if one may say so without irreverence, the worse for Latin. Tennyson was the better for everything he read. We all know his invitation to Frederick Maurice, if only because it describes Farringford, where so many able penmen, Americans and others, have described the knocker off the door. No poem could be more thoroughly Horatian in style, as 'the classical reader,' to whom Wordsworth appealed, at once perceives. While nothing can be more genially and characteristically English than the tone of these fine stanzas, with their allusions to the National Church, the

rite of baptism, and the Crimean War, 'Garrulous under a roof of pine' is 'almost an alcaic' as one's tutor used to say when one thought one had produced a complete example of that metre. 'The dust and heat and noise of town' is and is not *fumum et opes strepitumque Romæ.* Tennyson is always a scholar, and never a pedant. In his translations, the meaning reappears, but the idiom is changed.

As 'landscape-lover' and 'lord of language,' some affinity may be discerned between Tennyson and Horace, as well as between Tennyson and Virgil. Take, for instance, the description of Tivoli in the 7th Ode of the first book:—

> Me nec tam patiens Lacedæmon
> Nec tam Larissæ percussit campus opimæ,
> Quam domus Albuneæ resonantis
> Et præceps Anio ac Tiburni lucus et uda
> Mobilibus pomaria rivis.*

In this ode, as in the celebrated description of Soracte under its mantle of snow, specimens of what may be called Horace's vignettes, the art is to call up a picture by a single phrase, or even a single epithet. Horace had it as well as Virgil, and though Tennyson was more indebted to Nature than to either of them, I think he was indebted to both, to 'old popular Horace,' as well as to the other 'old poet fostered under friendlier skies.'

It is a commonplace and a platitude to lament that we have not more of Tennyson's Homeric translation. Only two short fragments have ever been given to the world. The first is the comparison of the watch-fires kindled by the Greeks with the stars shining in the

* 'Neither stern Sparta nor the rich Pelasgian fields ever struck me like the echoing temple of the Sibyl, and the rush of the Anio, and the grove of Tibur's founder, and the moist orchards with their rippling streams.'

heavens, from the eighth book of the *Iliad*. It is a test passage. The man who could translate that could translate anything, and Tennyson probably selected it to show what he could do. The triumph was complete. It may almost be said of these lines, as Tennyson himself said of his friend Fitzgerald's 'Omar Khayam,' that there is 'no version done in English so divinely well.' Perhaps the best lines both in the Greek and in the English are those which introduce the simile,

> As when in Heaven the stars above the moon
> Look beautiful, when all the winds are laid,
> And every height comes out, and jutting peak
> And valley, and the immeasurable heavens
> Break open to their highest, and all the stars
> Shine, and the shepherd gladdens in his heart.

The effect of the monosyllabic verb in the last line, followed by a break, recalls the famous

> Shook, but delayed to strike

of the *Paradise Lost*. Tennyson firmly believed in blank verse as the proper vehicle of Homeric translation. Perhaps the most successful of modern translators is Worsley, who adopted the Spenserian stanza. In this particular instance he has achieved one effect which deserves to be compared, and not unfavourably compared, with Tennyson's. The last line in the original describes the horses, who

> Ἑσταότες παρ' ὄχεσφιν ἐΰθρονον ἠῶ μίμνον.
>
> Fixt by their cars, waited the golden dawn,

is Tennyson's rendering.

> Hard by their chariots stood, waiting the dawn divine,

which is Worsley's, sounds more imposing, and seem to close the description with greater force. Homer, however, calls the dawn neither golden nor divine, but 'well-throned,' which may be likened to Shakespeare's

'vestal throned in the west,' meaning first the moon, and secondly Queen Elizabeth. Tennyson's second attempt, *Achilles over the Trench*, is less interesting. The episode of Achilles fighting under the immediate protection of Athene, and vanquishing the Trojans with the assistance of supernatural fire on his head, pertains to the perishable form rather than to the imperishable essence of the Homeric epic. The god from the machine does not appeal to us as it must have appealed to the audience of the rhapsodist. The knot never seems worthy of the champion. Oddly enough there is almost the same simile here also, except that the watch-fires are this time the standard, not the subject of comparison. Achilles's private halo is compared with them.

> And sheer-astounded were the charioteers
> To see the dread unwearіable fire
> That always o'er the great Peleion's head
> Burn'd, for the bright-eyed goddess made it burn.

Homer knew nothing about the supposed invulnerability of Achilles, who met his fate at the hands of Paris, as Hector told him he would. But the Trojans could not be expected to make provision against the influence of miracles upon the common trooper.

Tennyson, as is well known, detested English hexameters and pentameters. He thought them unsuited to the genius of the language. He laughed at them. In the emphatic words of Scripture, he could not away with them. He liked the metre no better in German. He himself wrote English hendecasyllables, English galliambics, and English alcaics in his noble Ode to Milton. He must, one would think, have admired—he could not help admiring—Mr. Swinburne's Sapphics. But hexameters, especially in rendering Homer, were his soul's abhorrence.

These lame hexameters, the strong-wing'd music of Homer!
No—but a most burlesque barbarous experiment.
When was a harsher sound ever heard, ye Muses, in England?
When did a frog coarser croak upon our Helicon?
Hexameters no worse than daring Germany gave us,
Barbarous experiment, barbarous hexameters!

I am not qualified to take up the cudgels for Voss. But Tennyson, when he burst out in this ferocious diatribe, can hardly have meant to include Dr. Hawtrey's beautiful translation of Helen's speech on the walls of Troy, beginning

Clearly the rest I behold of the dark-eyed sons of Achaia.

Tennyson is, of course, substantially right. The metre is not English, and cannot be made so. Hawtrey knew better than to try it on a large scale. He carefully chose the scene of his experiment and succeeded accordingly. Clough wrote English hexameters, and sometimes even pentameters, with amazing fluency and cleverness. Sometimes, as in his lines on the Pantheon, he managed them with dignity and splendour. But as a rule he used them when he meant to be slipshod and dropped them when he meant to be serious. English pentameters are utterly hopeless. As Tennyson once said, 'All men detest slops, particularly gruel,' is a fair specimen of the article. But his own published instances may be almost equalled from 'Catullus, whose dead songster never dies.' Schoolboys and professors are accustomed to imitate the smooth mechanical elegiacs of Ovid. But these did not begin with that amorous versifier.

Corneli, et factum me esse puta Hippocratem,

is not a pretty line, but it is pure Catullus. Take another case. Catullus made fun of a certain Arrius, or, as we might say, 'Arry, for his habitual employment of superfluous aitches. He mentions a horrible rumour

that since Arrius went to Syria, the Ionian Sea had become the Hionian, as it was said of a late Judge that 'the Helen became the Ellen in passing through the chops of the Channell.'

Jam non Ionios esse, sed Hionios

is surely as bad as

Barbarous experiment, barbarous hexameters.

English hexameters have not always been failures. If Longfellow wrote in *Evangeline* such a barbarous experiment as

Children's children sat on his knee and heard his great watch tick,

he also wrote,

Chanting the Hundredth Psalm, that grand old Puritan anthem,

which is not unlike the 'strong-winged music of Homer.' In Charles Kingsley's *Andromeda*, too, there are many Homeric lines. But these are the exceptions which would not be cited if they were not exceptions, and thus prove the rule. If we ever have the ideal translation of Homer in English verse, it will be in the metre of Milton and of Tennyson, not in his own.

*March*, 1893.

# MATTHEW ARNOLD'S LETTERS

'It has ever been a hobby of mine, though perhaps it is a truism, not a hobby, that the true life of a man is in his letters.'

So wrote John Henry Newman to his sister thirty-two years ago. Truisms, like paradoxes, must be taken with a grain of salt. Newman's own letters hardly bear out his own theory. Less than the Apology, less than the Lectures on the Present Position of Catholics in England (1851), less even than some of the famous sermons, such as the sermon on the Parting of Friends, are they the man. 'Biographers,' says Dr. Newman, 'varnish, they assign motives, they conjecture feelings, they interpret Lord Burleigh's nods, but contemporary letters are facts.' Letters are conclusive evidence of the fact that they were written, but not necessarily of the facts which they allege. If some letters are the most natural, others are the most artificial of all human compositions. They may be written with the fear that they will be published, or with the fear that they will not. Mr. Chamberlain addressed a private letter on a public question to the editor of a newspaper. Cicero, in one of his letters to Atticus, explains that he would not have expressed himself with so much freedom if he had not felt confident that his words would never be read by any other human eyes. But if Newman's remarks are true of any one, they are true of Matthew Arnold. His letters are, if possible, more natural than his conversation. In his witty, genial, and delightful talk there was

a serio-comic pretence which people with no humour mistook for affectation. His friendly, chatty, confidential letters combine the simplicity of a child with all the mental and imaginative resources of a scholar, a poet, a philosopher, and a man of the world. Mr. Arnold's family had either to deprive the public of what, apart from enjoyment, it must do every one good to read, or to run the risk of spoiling the letters by cutting out much that was most private and therefore most characteristic. Very few letters could have endured the severe process of excision and retrenchment to which these have been exposed. But Mrs. Arnold has rightly judged that they could stand even such a test. If she has erred at all, it is in the too scrupulous removal of affectionate references to herself.

No praise can be too high for the manner in which Mr. George Russell has discharged his task as editor. He has unhappily felt himself bound, by Mr. Arnold's expressed wish on the subject, to abstain from anything like a biographical narrative; and the letters are left to tell their own story, which it was not their purpose to do. But in a brief Prefatory Note he describes, with the knowledge of an intimate friend and the skill of a literary artist, the genuine character of Matthew Arnold. A meeting was held in the Jerusalem Chamber of Westminster Abbey soon after Mr. Arnold's death, to arrange some fitting memorial of his poetic genius and his public service. Some of the most distinguished men in England were there, and addressed the audience. There were the Dean of Westminster, Lord Coleridge, Mr. Jowett of Balliol, the fifteenth Earl of Derby, and Archbishop Thomson, all of whom are now gone except the Dean. To the eloquence of the speeches any testimonial from me would

be impertinent. But what must have struck every one who heard them was the deep personal feeling of irreparable loss that inspired them all—a feeling so strong that words were quite inadequate to do it justice. All the speakers were men of great intellectual power, fully appreciative of Mr. Arnold's poetry and criticism. But it was the moral beauty—the 'nobility,' as Mr. Jowett called it—of his life upon which they almost exclusively dwelt. He was indeed a good man in the best sense of that term. As Mr. Russell says, with equal insight and force, he was 'gentle, generous, enduring, laborious; a devoted husband, a most tender father, an unfailing friend.' The sort of biography to which Cardinal Newman referred has become altogether obsolete since 1863. It used to be said that the only 'Lives' worth reading were those of actors, because they were not supposed to be respectable, and so their biographers did not mind telling the truth about them. Times have changed indeed. Actors are now more respectable, or at least more respected, than bishops; and the new school of biography, which will always be associated with the name of Mr. Froude, aims at anything rather than the canonization of what a lady called 'the biographee.' Mr. Arnold's memory, though it is to be spared that ordeal, would have nothing to fear from it. 'Whatever record leap to light, he never shall be shamed.' Those who knew him best loved him most. He was a saint in his family, a hero to his publisher, and the idol of his friends.

At a dinner of old Balliol men, held when, for the first time in this century, there was a really great Primate of the English Church, Matthew Arnold had to return thanks for the toast of his health. He followed Archbishop Tait, an admirable speaker as well

as a true statesman, and remarked with exquisite urbanity that after such an impressive performance it might perhaps refresh the company to see a Balliol man who had not got on in the world. The writer of a descriptive report which appeared next day translated this into the rather coarse paraphrase: 'Mr. Matthew Arnold contrasted his own position and emoluments with those of the Archbishop of Canterbury.' But Matthew Arnold's spirit of cheerful content was not the least excellent of his many excellent gifts. Men with a fiftieth part of his natural capacity, who work for themselves, often realise an early competence and an ultimate fortune. Mr. Arnold worked for the country, and much of his leisure was spent in adding, by hook or by crook, to the pittance doled out to him from the Education Department. Matthew Arnold was blessed with the soundest of digestions and the sunniest of tempers. But the secret of his happiness was that self-denial was a pleasure to him, when it was endured for the sake of those he loved. He enjoyed living, even in London, and his passion for the country was as strong as Thoreau's. Whether he was at home or abroad, nature interested and charmed him. In the earliest of these letters, written to his mother on the 2nd of January, 1848, he says:—

'It was nearly dark when I left the Weybridge Station, but I could make out the wide sheet of the gray Thames gleaming through the general dusk as I came out on Chertsey Bridge. I never go along that shelving gravelly road up towards Laleham without interest, from Chertsey Lock to the turn where the drunken man lay. To-day, after morning church, I went up to Pentonhook, and passed the stream with the old volume, width, shine, rapid fulness, "kempshott" and swans, unchanged and unequalled, to my partial and remembering eyes at least.'

Although Mr. Arnold was an enthusiastic fisherman and rather fond of shooting, his interest in the country

was not that of a sportsman. It was the devotion which inspired his favourite modern poet and made him as good an interpreter of Wordsworth as Wordsworth was an interpreter of nature. Of all his critical writings there is none more full of perception, as there is none more characteristic of Mathew Arnold, than the Preface to the *Selections from Wordsworth*.

A very large number of Matthew Arnold's letters are addressed to his mother, who died in 1873 at the age of eighty-two, having survived her famous husband more than thirty years. Every one knows the poem on Rugby Chapel, and can learn from it that Matthew Arnold revered the memory of his father. His letters to his mother show that his father was rarely out of his thoughts, and he never loses an opportunity of tracing Dr. Arnold's influence upon modern thought. Dr. Arnold is chiefly known as the awful pedagogue of *Tom Brown's School Days*. Even in his *Life* by Dean Stanley the literary side of him is too much ignored. It was upon that side that his son delighted to dwell, the side presented in the *History of Rome* and the *Thucydides*. Dr. Arnold did not live to complete the *History* which has perhaps suffered from the popular impression that the early annals of Rome are all a myth, that Sir George Cornewall Lewis said so, and that there is no use in bothering about them. But the late Professor Freeman, no mean authority, was an ardent admirer of the book, and considered Dr. Arnold to be a true historian. And if anybody wishes not to study the text of Thucydides from the point of minute verbal scholarship, but to read the greatest of all historians with an intelligent guide, he will find Dr. Arnold exactly the guide he wants.

A remarkable proportion of the letters are addressed

to members of Mr. Arnold's own family. But perhaps the best of all were written to Mrs. Matthew Arnold when he was travelling. They give all the information which the most anxious wife could require, and they are never trivial or dull. It is certain, both from internal and external evidence, that no idea of publication ever entered the writer's mind. Yet every reader will cordially thank Mrs. Arnold for allowing them to appear. Among his correspondents outside the circle of the Arnolds, Lady de Rothschild must be esteemed peculiarly fortunate. In writing to her Mr. Arnold seems to have been always at his best.

In these *Epistolæ ad Familiares* literature occupies a comparatively small place. Nevertheless there is enough to throw an interesting light upon Mr. Arnold's strength and weakness as a critic. At the so-called Jubilee Dinner of the Oxford Union in 1873, the late Dr. Liddon, in proposing the toast of 'Literature,' for which Mr. Arnold was to respond, remarked that the great critic had taught them to criticise even himself. Matthew Arnold's satire was never barbed. It left no rankling wound behind it, and many of his victims were among his warmest admirers. The critical quality in which he most excelled was the invaluable gift of detecting merit below the surface. He liked to praise rather than to blame, as all good critics do. But it may be doubted whether he had the supreme faculty of judgment. He admired more than he imitated Sainte-Beuve. The dullest man cannot read 'Essays in Criticism' without having his mind stimulated and his views enlarged. The cleverest man cannot read the *Causeries du Lundi* without feeling chastened and humiliated by that vast learning, that infallible taste, that exquisite lucidity of style, that impregnable fortress of common sense.

Writing to his mother from London on the 7th of May, 1848, Matthew Arnold says :—

'I have just finished a German book I brought with me here; a mixture of poems and travelling journal by Heinrich Heine, the most famous of the young German literary set. He has a good deal of power, though more trick; however, he has thoroughly disgusted me. The Byronism of a German, of a man trying to be gloomy, cynical, impassioned, *moqueur*, etc., all *à la fois*, with their honest bonhommistic language and total want of experience of the kind that Lord Byron, an English peer with access everywhere, possessed, is the most ridiculous thing in the world.'

Of course this is a private letter, and Matthew Arnold's real view of Heine must be sought in his essay and his poem. But they are almost as inadequate as this, of which indeed they are chiefly an expansion. The *Reisebilder* contains much that is foolish, and much that is repulsive. But no one would gather from the passage quoted that it was one of the wittiest books ever written, or that it contained one of the most beautiful poems in the world. Heine himself may be said to have acknowledged the difficulty about the language by re-writing the book in French. He certainly never pretended to be an aristocrat, for he dwells frequently on his plebeian origin, and he was a disciple of Sterne rather than of Byron.

"Why is 'Villette' disagreeable?" This question was put by Matthew Arnold to his sister on the 14th of April, 1853. And he answers it himself as follows :—

'Because the writer's mind contains nothing but hunger, rebellion, and rage, and therefore that is all she can, in fact, put into her book. No fine writing can hide this thoroughly, and it will be fatal to her in the long run.'

He then proceeds to contrast 'Villette' with 'My Novel,' admitting, with a simplicity which seems not to be feigned, that 'Bulwer's nature is not a perfect one either.' It certainly was not, even according to the mundane standard of fallen man. But an Oxford scholar like

Mr. Arnold should have remembered his Aristotle: τὸ ὅτι before τὸ διότι. You establish your fact before you inquire into its causes. Dr. Johnson once sat down with Mrs. Hannah More before the outspread Sonnets of Milton, to consider why they were so bad. Is 'Villette' disagreeable? And what of 'Shirley,' by the same author? Does that, too, contain nothing but 'hunger, rebellion, and rage'? Miss Brontë was a woman of genius, and her genius forced its way through every disadvantage of material circumstances and mental training. Bulwer was a clever, highly-cultivated man of the world, with immense industry and consummate skill, enjoying all the advantages of wealth and station, but not possessing a spark of the true inward fire. 'Sublime mediocrity' is the utmost that can be said of Bulwer, and Matthew Arnold preferred him to Charlotte Brontë. On the 22nd of September, 1864, Mr. Arnold wrote to Mr. Dykes Campbell on the volume of Tennyson's poems containing 'Enoch Arden.' He was at first inclined to write a review of it, thinking—oddly enough—that 'Enoch Arden' was 'the best thing Tennyson had done.' He gave up the task because he feared that if he depreciated Tennyson he would be suspected of jealousy. He wrote:—

> 'I do not think Tennyson a great and powerful spirit in any line, as Goethe was in the line of modern thought, Wordsworth in that of contemplation, Byron even in that of passion; and unless a poet, especially a poet at this time of day, is that, my interest in him is only slight, and my conviction that he will not finally stand high is firm.'

It is not much more eccentric to put Tennyson below Byron than to put Bulwer Lytton above Miss Brontë.

But there must have been something wrong with a critic who could not appreciate the greatest poet of his own age and country, a man only thirteen years older than himself. May it not be that Mr. Arnold expected from poetry something which it is not the function

of poetry to give? Mr. Arnold did not seem to feel—what as a critic he surely should have felt—that he had to account for Tennyson, to explain how a man who was not 'a great and powerful spirit' had leavened the speech of educated men, had become a classic in his lifetime, only less a part of their language than the Bible and Shakespeare. If the true poet must be always setting traps or constructing puzzles, if every poem is to prove or disprove something, then 'Tithonus' is not a poem, and Tennyson was not a poet. But if the office of poetry be to express the great commonplaces of life, the objection that Tennyson has not a 'line' falls to the ground. What was Homer's 'line'? What was Shakespeare's? What was Keats's? They were on their own lines; they were themselves. Even if we take the case of Wordsworth, it is less the argumentative verse of the 'Excursion,' than such pieces as 'A Slumber did my Spirit Seal,' that stamp him as the true poet, not merely the metrical philosopher. Lovely and melodious as so much of Matthew Arnold's own poetry is, haunting the memory like a strain of music, he is best when he is simplest: when he draws from nature, as in the 'Scholar Gypsy'; or from human experience, as in those magic verses—

'For each day brings its petty dust
Our soon choked souls to fill;
And we forget because we must,
And not because we will.'

If Mr. Arnold liked 'metaphysical poetry,' he ought to have revelled in Browning. But he did not. His classic taste was shocked, as Tennyson's also was, by the frequent harshness and roughness of that undeniably 'powerful spirit.' He admired Browning just when Browning left his problems and wrote with absolute simplicity.

Mr. Arnold was justly proud of the vogue which his pet phrases had, and the readiness with which they were picked up by educated men. The writing world was, as he said, particularly fond of him. He supplied them with quotations, and they were not ungrateful, as he points out in his inimitable way. He writes to his mother:—

'I have been amused by getting a letter from Edward Dicey, asking me, in the name of the proprietors of the *Daily Telegraph*, to give them a notice of Blake the artist, and to name my own price. I sent a civil refusal, but you may depend upon it Lord Lytton was right in saying that it is no inconsiderable advantage to me that all the writing world have a kind of weakness for me, even at the time they are attacking me.'

Afterwards he wrote a good deal for the *Pall Mall Gazette* when Mr. John Morley was its editor, and his objection to anonymous writing, which had been very strong, disappeared. Mr. Disraeli congratulated him on the popularity of 'Philistines,' 'Sweetness and Light,' and the rest of them. This was a real compliment coming from a master of many phrases, and it was highly appreciated. But this sort of success was really valuable less in itself than as a proof that his books were read. 'Philistines' is from the German, 'Sweetness and Light' from Swift. The description of Oxford at the end of the Preface to *Essays in Criticism* was his own, and will be read with pleasure, like 'Dover Beach,' while the English language endures. There is nothing more interesting in these pages than the account of Mr. Arnold's conversation with Mr. Disraeli at Aston Clinton, the late Sir Anthony de Rothschild's house in Buckinghamshire. Mr. Disraeli, who unaffectedly liked and admired men of letters, and whose sense of humour never slumbered, was at his best with Matthew Arnold. With him he was not only courteous, as he was not

always, but simple and sincere, as he was seldom. Those who have read Mr. Disraeli's beautiful speech in the House of Commons on the death of Cobden, quoted in Mr. Morley's biography, will find that on this occasion he expressed the same opinion in private. 'Cobden was born a statesman, and his reasoning is always like a statesman's, and striking.' Being reminded that he had met Mr. Arnold some years before, Mr. Disraeli said:—

"'Ah, yes, I remember. At that time I had a great respect for the name you bore, but you yourself were little known. Now you are well known. You have made a reputation, but you will go further yet. You have a great future before you, and you deserve it.'"

Could anything have been better said? Having acknowledged the compliment, Mr. Arnold referred to Mr. Disraeli's abandonment of literature for politics.

"'Yes,' he replied, 'one does not settle these things for one's self, and politics and literature are both very attractive; still, in the one, one's work lasts, and in the other it doesn't.' He went on to say that he had given up literature because he was not one of those people who can do two things at once, but that he admired most the men like Cicero, who could."

There is as yet no 'Life' of Lord Beaconsfield, except Mr. Froude's little book. But among all the scattered notices of that eminent and extraordinary man in the political memories of his generation, I do not know one which exhibits him in so attractive a light as does this spontaneous and contemporaneous letter from Matthew Arnold to his mother.

When Mr. Arnold returned from the United States full of delight at the unbounded courtesy and hospitality with which he had been received, he told with glee and gusto a story of the late Mr. Barnum. The great showman, he said, had invited him to his house in the following terms: 'You, sir, are a celebrity. I am a notoriety. We ought to be acquainted.' 'I couldn't

go', he added, 'but it was very nice of him.' The letters do not deal much with the private lives of public men. They are for the most part concerned either with higher or more homely topics. But there is a charming and most characteristic anecdote of Samuel Wilberforce, the famous Bishop of Oxford, which is too good to be passed over. It occurs in a letter to his mother, dated the 2nd of February, 1864, and it refers once more to Aston Clinton, a house where he always liked to stay :—

"The Bishop of Oxford had a rather difficult task of it in his sermon, for opposite to him was ranged all the house of Israel, and he is a man who likes to make things pleasant to those he is on friendly terms with. He preached on Abraham, his force of character and his influence on his family; he fully saved his honour by introducing the mention of Christianity three or four times, but the sermon was in general a sermon which Jews as well as Christians could receive. His manner and delivery are well worth studying, and I am very glad to have heard him. A truly emotional spirit he undoubtedly has beneath his outside of society-haunting and men-pleasing, and each of the two lives he leads gives him the more zest for the other. Any real power of mind he has not. Some of the thinking, or pretended thinking, in his sermon was sophistical and hollow beyond belief. I was interested in finding how instinctively Lady de Rothschild had seized on this. His chaplain told me, however, that I had not heard him at his best, as he certainly preached under some constraint."

Neither bishop nor chaplain held the opinion, which a clergyman ought to hold, that the way to be a gentleman is to be a Christian.

There are in these volumes no letters to the late Lord Coleridge, who was perhaps Mr. Arnold's oldest and most intimate friend. They happened to meet in America, and Mr. Arnold describes himself as embarrassed at the unction of the eulogies bestowed upon him in public by the Lord Chief Justice of England. Lord Coleridge was a various man, a great orator, a great social personage, a man of letters even more than of law, an admirable talker, but, above all, a consummate master of irony and sarcasm. A letter from Matthew Arnold to his

wife, written in 1854, contains a delicious reference to a review of his own poems by the future Chief Justice :—

> 'My love to J. D. C. [John Duke Coleridge], and tell him that the limited circulation of the 'Christian Remembrancer' makes the unquestionable viciousness of his article of little importance. I am sure he will be gratified to think that it is so.'

This is in the true Coleridgean style, and quite perfect in its way. But of course it must not be taken as an expression of annoyance or resentment. Matthew Arnold was never spiteful, and hardly ever angry. It was his fun, and his fun was always irresistible.

Mr. Arnold's politics were rather French than English. He adopted early in life, and retained to the end, the opinion that his own country was intellectually below France; that the French were logical, whereas we were not; and that there was a serious danger in the British preference for common sense, or the rule of thumb, to principles and ideas. The sort of prejudice embodied in Mr. Disraeli's celebrated dictum that this country is not governed by logic, but by Parliament, he held to be mischievous clap-trap, if indeed Mr. Disraeli was not laughing in his sleeve. It is curious that with this turn of mind he should have been such an enthusiastic admirer of Burke, with whom the British Constitution was an idol, not to say a fetish. Perhaps he was captivated and carried away by the 'grand style' of that splendid and princely writer. However that may be, Mr. Arnold, though he called himself first a Liberal and afterwards a Liberal-Unionist, never belonged to any political party. Although he liked Mr. Disraeli in private,—and no wonder,—he called him a charlatan in reference to his public career. In Mr. Gladstone he had no confidence, believing him to be swayed by ecclesiastical bias, at the mercy of fitful

enthusiasm, and opposed to real freedom of thought. While he wrote warmly in praise of Burke's attachment to his native land, and pointed out that the liberality of his Irish policy was unaffected by the general reaction of his opinions after 1789, he would not hear of Home Rule. The fact is, that although he took an interest in politics from time to time, and always interested others when he wrote about them, he treated them, as he was well entitled to do, piecemeal and in a desultory fashion. He made too little allowance for men who had to act and to do the best they could with the imperfect means at their disposal. 'I hold,' he said once, in a sentence printed under the clever caricature of him in *Vanity Fair*, 'I hold that the critic should keep out of the region of immediate practice.' Fortunately for mankind he did not follow his own maxim in poetry. In politics he certainly did. But now and again, with the true critical insight, he drew the mental portrait of a statesman as no one else could have drawn it. In 1870 the University of Oxford, which he loved and served, conferred upon him an honorary degree, and made him, according to the rather absurd form in such cases, a Doctor of Civil Law. Lord Salisbury, as Chancellor of the University, presided at the ceremony, and in Mr. Arnold's opinion performed his part very well. Concerning him Mr. Arnold writes to his mother:—

'He is a dangerous man, though, and chiefly from his want of any true sense and experience of literature and its beneficent function. Religion he knows, and physical science he knows; but the immense work between the two, which is for literature to accomplish, he knows nothing of, and all his speeches pointed this way. On the one hand he was full of the great future for physical science, and begging the University to make up her mind to it, and to resign much of her literary studies; on the other hand he was full—almost defiantly full—of counsels and resolves for retaining and upholding the old ecclesiastical and dogmatic form of religion. From a juxtaposition of this kind nothing

but shocks and collisions can come; and I know no one, indeed, more likely to provoke shocks and collisions than men like Lord Salisbury.'

All this is profoundly true, though as different as possible from the ordinary praise and abuse of the present Prime Minister. People argue that Lord Salisbury is a man of letters because he can write a good style. They forget that he was a journalist when journalists were required to know the English language. If any one will turn to Lord Salisbury's address, delivered at Oxford, as President of the British Association in 1894, he will see how thoroughly Matthew Arnold understood the man. Religious equality has been enforced at Oxford in spite of Lord Salisbury; and religion, being left to its own resources, is more powerful there than it was in the old days of compulsory and conservative orthodoxy. Physical science is amply recognised. But one change there has been which neither Lord Salisbury nor Mr. Arnold in 1870 foresaw,—Oxford has fallen into the hands of the specialists. Philologists and physiologists, historians and lawyers, geologists and theologians, have substituted for the old idea of a liberal education a multitude of narrow and technical schools for cramming the memory and starving the intellect. The old education may have been defective; but at least it was an education, and not an apprenticeship.

When he was in Rome in 1865, Matthew Arnold wrote to his mother:—

'Here in Italy one feels that all time spent out of Italy by tourists in France, Germany, Switzerland, etc., is—human life being so short—time misspent. Greece and parts of the East are the only other places to go to.'

Thousands, from Goethe to Mr. Foker, must have felt the same about Italy. But Matthew Arnold discovered twenty years later that the West, as well as the East,

was worth a visit. His letters from America are perhaps the most amusing of all. One to his younger daughter, now Mrs. Wodehouse, gives a graphic account of the way in which his time was spent. It was written from the Union Club, Chicago, January 21st, 1884:—

'We got here late last night. We are staying with a great bookseller, who is also a general, and is always called General M'Clurg. He really was made a general in the Civil War, being a brisk and prominent man, but it is odd to address a bookseller as *General*. We arrived at the station at eight in the evening, and drove to his house. After a hasty dinner he hurried me off to a reception at the Literary Club, explaining to me on the way that I should have to make a speech. This was the programme. The hundred members of the club were gathered together when we arrived. The president received me, and then the whole club filed out to supper, I standing by the president and being presented to each member and shaking hands with him as he passed me. The supper-table was splendidly decorated with flowers. I was put in a great chair by the president, and, having just dined, had to go through the whole course, from oysters to ice, with plenty of champagne. . . . We have had a week of good houses (I consider myself now as an actor, for my managers take me about with theatrical tickets, at reduced rates, over the railways, and the tickets have *Matthew Arnold troupe* printed on them).'

Mr. Arnold gave the American people of his best. He told Mr. Russell that he would rather be remembered by the lectures he delivered in the United States than by any other of his compositions in prose. He did not altogether like lecturing. He had not been accustomed to addressing large audiences, and he had a good deal of trouble with the management of his voice. But the kindness of his reception was such that, as his letters show, he thoroughly enjoyed himself.

Mr. Russell, in his Prefatory Note to these volumes, expresses the opinion that Matthew Arnold's theology, 'once the subject of some just criticism, seems now a matter of comparatively little moment: for indeed his nature was essentially religious.' Mr. Russell's Note, as he modestly calls it, is so good that one hesitates to find fault with anything it contains. But this sentence

introduces so many controversial questions, and bears so distinctly upon a most significant part of Mr. Arnold's work, that it cannot be passed over in silence. I respectfully demur to the logic. That Mr. Arnold's nature was essentially religious his life and writings alike prove. But does it follow that because his nature was essentially religious, his theology should be a matter of comparatively little moment? That is rather a cynical view of the relation between theology and religion. An irreligious man could never have written *St. Paul and Protestantism*, or *Literature and Dogma*, or *God and the Bible*. Matthew Arnold's theology was not original. It was the theology of Ewald and of Renan, men of great power and learning, who must be refuted by argument and not dismissed with an epithet. By his adroit use of the adjective 'just,' Mr. Russell disposes of three volumes in one syllable. It seems, however, probable that by Mr. Arnold's theology is meant, not his opinions, but his methods; not his theology proper, but his theological style. A wider issue could hardly be raised. We have all in our youth composed more or less tedious and unprofitable essays upon the thesis that ridicule is (or is not) a test of truth. For my part I do not propose to repeat my offence. But it so happens that in one of these very letters Mr. Arnold endeavours to show, with obvious sincerity, that the criticism upon his theological manner was not 'just.' The passage occurs in a letter to his sister, Miss Arnold. He belonged to a very orthodox family, and in religious matters his foes were those of his own household. In 1874 he writes:—

'There is a levity which is altogether evil; but to treat miracles and the common anthropomorphic ideas of God as what one may lose and yet keep one's hope, courage, and joy, as what are not really matters of life and death in the keeping or losing of them, this is

desirable and necessary, if one holds, as I do, that the common anthropomorphic ideas of God and the reliance on miracles must and will inevitably pass away. This I say not to pain you, but to make my position clear to you.'

Nobody who reads that passage can doubt that the writer meant every word he wrote, and the irresistible inference is that in all his theological works—if indeed they are to be so designated—he intended to free religion from what he considered injurious to it. The expression which, of all that he wrote, gave the deepest offence, and which need not be repeated, he withdrew on finding that it had inflicted especial pain upon the distinguished philanthropist who was associated with it. Even in this letter to his sister Mr. Arnold could not refrain from one retaliatory blow at his accusers. 'The religious world which complains of me,' he says, 'would not read me if I treated my subject as they say it ought to be treated.' When Samuel Rogers was reproached for saying disagreeable things, he replied: 'I have a very weak voice, and if I did not say disagreeable things nobody would hear what I said.' Some of Mr. Arnold's critics must have been acquainted with Pascal. The profundity of Pascal's genius was only equalled by the fervour of his piety. Yet in his *Provincial Letters*, which deal entirely with theological subjects, he exhausts the resources of wit and irony in making the doctrines of the Jesuits ridiculous. Mr. Russell may reply that the doctrines of the Jesuits are false, while the opinions of 'the Bishops of Winchester and Gloucester' are true. But that is hardly the point.

Many years before Mr. Arnold himself took up religious subjects he fell in with Greg's *Creed of Christendom*, and thus wrote of it to his mother in 1863:—

'Greg's mistake lies in representing to his imagination the exis-

tence of a great body of people excluded from the consolations of the Bible by the popular Protestant doctrine of verbal inspiration. That is stuff. The mass of people take from the Bible what suits them, and quietly leave on one side all that does not. He, like so many other people, does not apprehend the vital distinction between religion and criticism.'

Those were the people whom Mr. Arnold's treatment of the Bible especially irritated. They were conventional without being serious. He was serious without being conventional. They took his humour for flippancy because their own flippancy was devoid of humour. The essential connection of humour and reverence can be missed by no student of literature and of life. No one could be more nobly serious than Mr. Arnold, as in his poetry, which is the best and the most enduring part of him. But there are delusions, absurd as well as pernicious, for which laughter is the proper cure. When Voltaire exposed religious persecution to the ridicule and contempt of civilized mankind, he did a real service to religion as well as to humanity. I remember a preacher before the University of Oxford exhorting us to 'hold fast to the integrity of our anthropomorphism.' I cannot help thinking that a dose of Matthew Arnold would have been good alike for him and for his congregation.

Not that Mr. Arnold was without prejudices. Far from it. He did not like Nonconformists. Referring to James Montgomery, the Moravian hymn-writer, he says: 'Of all dull, stagnant, unedifying *entourages*, that of middle-class Dissent, which environed Montgomery, seems to me the stupidest.' In his hatred of Dissent and of the middle class, Mr. Arnold was at least impartial. For while on the one hand he was a clergyman's son, he certainly belonged to the middle class. He was too fond of classification. He should have remembered his own excellent saying that in England

there is no such sharp division between classes as exists in some Continental countries. The middle-class Dissenter does not divide his time between sanding his sugar and saying his prayers. Nor do 'aristocrats' all eat off gold plate, fare sumptuously every day, and entertain reasonable doubts of their own paternity. The House of Lords is like a dull and empty House of Commons. The working-men in the House of Commons are much the same as the rest, except that, if anything, they have rather better manners. It is true that when Mr. Arnold thus wrote of Dissent, the Dissenters were excluded from the Universities, or at all events from posts of honour and emolument therein. But Dr. Martineau is a more learned man and a more subtle thinker than Mr. Arnold.

Matthew Arnold never for a moment forgot that he was his father's son. In 1855, when he was thirty-two, his mother found and sent him a letter of his father's. He acknowledged it in the following terms:—

'I ought before this to have thanked you for sending the letter which is ennobling and refreshing, as everything which proceeds from him always is, besides the pathetic interest of the circumstances of its writing and finding. I think he was thirty-five when that letter was written; and how he had forecast and revolved, even then, the serious interests and welfare of his children—at a time when, to many men, their children are still little more than playthings! He might well hope to bring up children, when he made that bringing-up so distinctly his thought beforehand; and we who treat the matter so carelessly and lazily—we can hardly expect ours to do more than *grow up* at hazard, not be *brought up* at all. But this is just what makes him great—that he was not only a good man saving his own soul by righteousness, but that he carried so many others with him in his hand and saved them, if they would let him, along with himself.'

Dr. Arnold was cut off in the prime of life, leaving his *History of Rome* a fragment, and his work at Rugby incomplete. The true presentment of him is given by Dean Stanley rather than by Judge Hughes. His system of school management he introduced from Winchester,

adding only the sermon to the cane. His ideas of political philosophy were much more interesting and remarkable. Like his son, he was considered a heretic by the Scribes and Pharisees of his day. Dr. Stanley, who ought to know, says he was a Broad Churchman. But he held the theory that Church and State were two aspects of the same thing: that the Church was the State on its ecclesiastical side, and that the State was the Church on its political side. Nonconformists were erring brethren, who really belonged to the Church, although they chose to reject its ministrations. But those who were not Christians were outside the State as well as the Church, and, though entitled to protection because they paid taxes, had no right to sit in Parliament, or even to vote. While Matthew Arnold travelled a long way beyond his father's theological boundaries, and was certainly not opposed to the emancipation of the Jews, he inherited and adopted Dr. Arnold's invincible faith in truth, righteousness, and innocence. No line of his poetry suggests anything but what is lovely and of good report. No act of his life could have been condemned by the Puritan rigour of his father. From his father also he derived much of his inbred taste and literary sense. Dr. Arnold's style is always lucid, dignified, and impressive. His mind was steeped in that standard and touchstone of perfection, the literature of Athens. Plato and Thucydides were the favourites of the father; Homer and Sophocles of the son. Greece is justified of her children.

*January*, 1896.

# THE DECAY OF CLASSICAL QUOTATION

In *Le Lys Rouge*, by M. Anatole France, a work not on all grounds, or for all persons, to be recommended, there is the following passage: 'Schmoll est sans rancune. C'est une vertu de sa race. Il n'en veut pas à ceux qu'il persecute. Un jour montant l'escalier de l'Institut, en compagnie de Renan et d'Oppert, il recontra Marmet, et lui tendit la main. Marmet refusa de la prendre, et dit: "Je ne vous connais pas." "Me prenez-vous pour une inscription latine?" répliqua Schmoll.'

The retort may have been suggested by a remark of Charles Lamb, too familiar even for quotation. It is, I suppose, directed by M. France, himself a classical scholar of equal brilliancy and learning, against the school of recondite investigators who know all the 'dead languages' except Latin and Greek. One of them, a great authority, I believe, on Accadian seals, expressed or implied in a recent controversy the rather startling opinion that by τετράκυκλος ἅμαξα, Herodotus meant not a four-wheeled wagon, but a wagon in each of whose wheels there were four spokes. The father of history, in one of those exquisite sentences where the appearance of childlike innocence marks a profound and penetrating judgment of human affairs and others, says that a certain theorist, having raised the argument into the unseen, cannot be refuted. M. France, through the mouth of M. Schmoll, hints that there are men with a high reputation for learning, which they maintain so

long, and so long only, as they confine themselves to subjects where the ordinary critic cannot follow them. This new learning has survived the laborious scepticism of Sir George Cornewall Lewis, and the polite irony of Mr. Jowett, who observed that the deciphering of inscriptions was a healthy amusement under a blue sky. It is sometimes assumed to have superseded the old-fashioned scholarship, which doubtless has its limitations. I recollect, for instance, being advised by a clergyman of the Church of England not to read the New Testament in the original tongue, for fear of spoiling my Greek prose, in which there was nothing to spoil. An eminent scholar, who, being tired of college lectures, condescended to accept a country living, was described by an old friend who went to stay with him as preaching in the morning in the style of Cicero and in the afternoon in the style of Tacitus. Neither style appeared to disturb the slumbers of his parishioners. 'Hæ autem observationes,' as an undergraduate once wrote, in the style neither of Tacitus nor of Cicero, 'neque hic sunt, neque illic.' But these observations are neither here nor there.

An eminent living statesman was once asked whether he thought it possible that Mr. Pitt could have spoken in the House of Commons after drinking three bottles of port. He replied, 'You must remember that he was addressing an audience very few of whom had drunk less than two.' It is often asserted that in the unreformed House of Commons, as in the exclusive society of the old Whig and Tory cliques, classical scholarship, like the power of carrying liquor, was general, if not universal. I saw a correspondence the other day on the alleged decline of classical quotation, in which everybody seemed to agree that the capacity for understanding Homer and

Virgil had gone out with ruffles and swords, or at least with stocks and coaches. This would certainly be odd if it were true; but it is not true. Mr. Gladstone, it has been said, is the last man who will ever quote Lucretius in Parliament. Except for the familiar tag which begins, 'Suave mari magno,' he was probably the first. 'Say what you've got to say, don't quote Latin, and sit down,' was the Duke of Wellington's advice to a new member. But the Duke only sat in the unreformed House, and was possibly hitting at Peel. A late professor failed in debate because he violated all the three maxims of the Duke. He might have disregarded the second with impunity. There never was a more persistent quoter of Horace than the Duke's colleague, Sir Robert Peel. He did not abate his practice after 1832. In 1866 Mr. Gladstone and Mr. Lowe, both as good scholars as Peel, almost exhausted the second book of the 'Æneid,' and left the Trojan horse without a leg to stand on. 'Does my right honourable friend know how the passage continues?' 'My right honourable friend stops at what is for him a very convenient point; but let me refresh his recollection of the lines which immediately follow.' Virgil was treated as if he had been a living writer of despatches, instead of a poet whose language was no longer spoken, and who had been dead nearly nineteen hundred years. Mr. Disraeli, whose own incursions into classical literature were neither frequent nor fortunate, sneered at Peel for never making a Latin quotation which had not already received the meed of Parliamentary applause. To Horace the British Isles were the other end of the world, and he could not have conceived or imagined that his works would ever have been read in them, except by a Roman governor or legionary.

It would be interesting to trace the history of classical quotation. The habit may degenerate into mere literary and rhetorical vanity, as Lord Rosebery thinks that it did with Chatham. But if we want to understand the peculiar virtue of a Horatian or Virgilian allusion we must go a good deal further back than Chatham's time. Why did Bacon write in Latin? Because, though a master, and not an unconscious master, of the noblest English prose, he thought that modern languages would 'play the bankrupt with books.' He did not, in short, believe that English would last. Although he lived in a great age of enterprise and discovery, the future of his mother tongue was beyond even his powers of vision. Philosophic treatises are no longer written, diplomatic correspondence is no longer conducted, in what was meant for Latin, though it would have 'made Quintilian stare and gasp.' Where, then, it may be asked, is the use of classical quotations? They have survived the only excuse for them. The reason for their existence is gone. They are mere pedantry and affectation. I will not say that if other people don't like them I do, because that would be at once arrogant and inconclusive. Nor will I retort that a universal language is still put forward as an ideal, and that I prefer Greek or Latin to Volapuk. I have no wish to be thought flippant. But look at those 'facts,' which practical men always profess to hold in so much esteem. Sir Henry Maine, who was certainly not an impulsive enthusiast, may have gone too far when he wrote that, 'except the blind forces of nature, nothing moves in this world which is not Greek in its origin.' But it is a hoary platitude that a few great masters of language and of life have uttered in imperishable words truths which are to all countries and all ages

the same. Their writings are known, and, except in the dreariest epoch of the world's history, have been known since they were composed to the 'gentlemen of the intellect' all over the world. To that circle, neither small nor unimportant, they speak more eloquently, more directly, more immediately than pages of original or pseudo-original argument in any modern lingo. Every one knows Lord Carteret's dying quotation from Homer, if only as an impressive lesson in the unity of history and the nothingness of time.

The superstition that the classics are obsolete is sufficiently refuted by Mr. Mackail's *History of Latin Literature*. A more delightful book it would be difficult to find. Mr. Mackail is a critical enthusiast, and there can be no better combination. When Bentley's daughter reproached him with spending so much of his time on the works of others, instead of writing books of his own, he replied with the humility of a true scholar that he could not hope to rival those 'old fellows,' but that on their shoulders he had a commanding position. Bentley was not always humble, and he failed to realise that the worst thing we can do with the classics is to rewrite them. But that such an intellect as his should have been cheerfully devoted to mere explanation and correction is a marvellous tribute to the permanent value of what he corrected, or at least explained. 'It is,' says Mr. Mackail at the beginning of his chapter on Lucretius, 'it is hardly an exaggeration to say that the Rome of Cicero is as familiar to modern English readers as the London of Queen Anne, to readers of Modern France as the Paris of Louis Quatorze.' But, as he proceeds to point out, the figure of the great philosophical poet of the Roman Republic is shrouded in a darkness as impenetrable as that which

encompasses Shakespeare's, Nobody has yet suggested —why does not somebody suggest?—that Cicero wrote the *De Rerum Naturâ*. It would be more plausible than the theory that Bacon wrote *Hamlet*. Cicero, it must be admitted, composed a famous hexameter which is not quite on a level with 'Insatiabiliter deflevimus, æternumque. Nulla dies nobis mærorem e pectore demet.' But Bacon indited a poem which is extant, which may be found in Mr. Palgrave's *Golden Treasury*, and in spite of which men not certified as lunatics believe that he was the author of 'Take, O take those lips away,' 'Who is Sylvia?' and the Dirge in *Cymbeline*. St. Jerome, the first Broad Churchman, as Bishop Thirlwall called him, is our sole authority for the life of Lucretius, and from him Tennyson took the story of his poem. St. Jerome does not go so far as to say that Cicero wrote Lucretius. His own lion would have devoured him if he had. But he says that Cicero emended Lucretius, and no one says that Bacon anticipated Theobald.

A French critic speaks of some poetry which he admired as 'beau comme la prose.' The remark could only have been made by a Frenchman and in reference to French literature. But there is a curious contrast between the archaic vigour of Lucretius's verse and the polished smoothness of Cicero's prose. Cicero and Lucretius were contemporaries. To go from Lucretius to Virgil—his junior by only a quarter of a century—is almost like going from Spenser to Wordsworth, who were separated by two centuries and a half. On the other hand, Latin prose, though it took other forms, never became more perfectly finished after Cicero's death, so that nearly a hundred and fifty years later than that event Quintilian declared appreciation of Cicero to be the criterion of progress, the touchstone

of taste. 'Cicero's unique and imperishable glory,' writes Mr. Mackail, 'is not, as he thought himself, that of having put down the revolutionary movement of Catiline, nor, as later ages thought, that of having rivalled Demosthenes in the *Second Philippic* or confuted atheism in the *De Naturâ Deorum*. It is that he created a language which remained for sixteen centuries that of the civilised world, and used that language to create a style which nineteen centuries have not replaced, and in some respects have scarcely altered.' Erasmus lived more than fourteen hundred years after Quintilian; but Erasmus, like Quintilian, was an imitator of Cicero. The echo of the famous 'esse videatur,' with which Cicero was accused of too often ending his sentences, may be heard in the contemporary rhetoric of Parliament and the platform. When Professor Mommsen called Cicero a journalist he meant to depreciate him; but never before or since did a long-suffering class receive so splendid a compliment. Mommsen wrote his brilliant account of the transition between the Republic and the Empire—the most attractive part of his history—in the apparent belief that the vilification of Cicero was necessary to the glorification of Cæsar. In Mommsen's eyes the Empire was the deliverance of the people from the thraldom of the aristocracy, and Cæsar was the popular hero. Cicero did not survive the Civil War, which was renewed after Cæsar's death. It is a period which can never lose its fascination for educated mankind. Cæsar and Antony fought in it. Its poet was Catullus, and the correspondence of Cicero is the chief source of our information in regard to it.

'Cæsar,' says Mommsen, 'is the entire and perfect man.' Such a judgment lacks distinction, and might, by an unfavourable critic, be called crude. Mr. Mackail

says, with more effect because with less violence, that 'the combination of literary power of the very first order with his unparalleled military and political genius is perhaps unique in history.' Intellectually he was as much above Napoleon as Napoleon was above Wellington, or as Wellington was above Grant. Cicero, his political opponent, who hated and dreaded him, pronounced him to be an orator of the highest rank; and of oratory even Mommsen would admit that Cicero was a judge. Cæsar, the only man identified by that world-wide symbol of imperial rule, was himself, perhaps, too great a master of style to be what is called a 'patron of letters.' That position was reserved for Augustus, who was not an author. Ben Jonson has described in *The Poetaster* the graceful and easy footing on which Horace, Ovid, and Virgil enjoyed the friendship of the Emperor. Ovid, as we know, fell into disgrace, not, as Mr. Mackail remarks, because he wrote improper poetry, but for some more personal reason which can no longer be discovered. Virgil remained the darling of the Court, and became the imperishable glory of the Roman world. Mr. Mackail is a great authority on Virgil, whom he has translated. But I cannot think he is altogether just to the Eclogues. He says that their 'execution is uncertain, hesitating, sometimes extraordinarily feeble.' He speaks of their immature and tremulous cadences. He declares that 'there are lines in more than one Eclogue which remind one, in everything but their langour, of the flattest parts of Lucretius,' If the Eclogues are read with the idylls of Theocritus, or immediately after them, they may appear weak and forced, though there are golden passages whose fascination cannot be destroyed. But, as Mr. Mackail himself elsewhere urges, Virgil was not a mere mixture of Theocritus, Hesiod, and Homer,

The imitative character of Latin literature does not mean that the Roman poets were all copyists. It was the fashion, or the rule, expressed by Horace and followed by all, to regard the Greek poets as unapproachable models of excellence, to which every one should get as near as he could. Virgil was a keen observer and a passionate lover of nature.

It is curious that, while Mr. Mackail dwells so much upon Theocritus in criticising the Eclogues, he never once mentions Hesiod in his account of the Georgics, 'in mere technical finish the most perfect work of Latin, or perhaps of any literature.' The tenth Satire of Juvenal, a truly original poet to whom Mr. Mackail seems hardly just, is at least as highly finished as any of the Georgics. The *Æneid*, which has been more quoted, in all civilised countries and in all subsequent ages, than any other poem ever written, was not finished at all. On the equally fruitless and endless comparison between the *Æneid* and the *Iliad*, or the *Æneid* and the *Odyssey*, Mr. Mackail has some excellent remarks. 'No great work of art,' as he truly says, 'can be usefully judged by comparison with any other great work of art. It may, indeed, be interesting and fertile to compare one with another, in order to seize more sharply and appropriate more vividly the special beauty of each. But to press comparison further, and to depreciate one because it has not what is the special quality of the other, is to lose sight of the function of criticism.' The most illustrious admirer of Virgil was unacquainted with Homer; but if Dante could have read the Homeric poems, it is not likely, though it is possible, that his reverence for Virgil would have been diminished. It might be plausibly argued that Virgil owed as much to Lucretius as to Homer, and Mr. Mackail quotes, from the twelfth

book of the *Æneid* a simile which Lucretius might have made. Virgil, however, has got beyond criticism, and no critic can any longer affect his position in the world of thought. A charm which defies analysis, an unearthly beauty which only Tennyson has expressed, a haunting pathos which has appealed to religious minds more powerfully than any Christian poem except the *Divine Comedy*, have established Virgil for ever. 'Deep in the general heart of man his power survives.' A line of Virgil converted Savonarola. St. Augustine, as he says in his *Confessions*, was torn between the love of Dido and the love of God.

To us Horace is an original poet, and the translation of Horace is an almost proverbial example of courted failure, of attempting to square the circle, which a distinguished soldier told Professor de Morgan that any fool could do with a sheet of paper and half a crown. What Horace says of Pindar we should say of Horace. His imitators meet the fate of Icarus, without even giving their names to the sea in which they fall. But Horace, though he despised those who imitated him in his lifetime, and referred to them with bitter scorn, would have been the last man to call himself original. He was, and he boasted of being, the interpreter of Greek ideas, of Greek metre, of Greek civilisation, and of Greek style. 'Among the many amazing achievements of Greek genius in the field of human thought,' says Mr. Mackail, 'were a lyrical poetry of unexampled beauty, a refined critical faculty, and, later than the great thinkers and outside of the strict schools, a temperate philosophy of life, such as we see afterwards in the beautiful personality of Plutarch. In all these, then, Horace interpreted Greece to the world, while adding that peculiarly Roman urbanity—the spirit at once of

the grown man as distinguished from children, of the man of the world, and of the gentleman—which up till now has been a dominant ideal over the thought and life of Europe.' Of Horace's lyrics Munro well said that the mould was broken at his death. Neither in Latin nor in any other language has anything like them been written since. But of course there were two Horaces. There was the consummate and incomparable master of lyric verse. There was the genial, half-serious satirist, illustrating the common experience of life in lines which he himself described as prosaic. It would not be easy to decide in which of his two characters he has exercised the profounder influence upon the later literature of Europe. The spirit of his Odes is evanescent, and all efforts to recapture or re-embody it have failed. The spirit—or perhaps one should say the drift—of his Satires and Epistles was caught and reproduced by Pope. The charming grace of Pope's compliments to Arbuthnot and Murray are no less and no more Horatian than the savage ferocity of his libels on Lady Mary Wortley and Lord Hervey. For Pope sympathised with the lowest as well as with the highest side of Horace, and 'the most loathsome of so-called poems,' as Mr. Ruskin calls the Journey to Brundusium, was not disagreeable to him. Mr. Mackail's treatment of Virgil and Horace is summary. Summary treatment was imposed upon him by the necessities of his task. That task has been performed with so much power, so much insight, so much reverence, and so much knowledge, that while any intelligent reader can enjoy the result, it will be appreciated most highly by those most competent to judge of it. Perhaps the special interest and the special value of Mr. Mackail's book is that it brings home with vivid force the nearness of the Latin, and therefore of the Greek, writers to ourselves.

These old friends have suffered grievously at the hands of commentators and grammarians. The schoolboy's hatred of his classics, his rooted belief that they were pedantic bores into whose tedious pages you must hammer the sense as best you can, that, as one of them put it, Cæsar was a great Roman general who wrote a book for beginners in Latin, is not Horace's fault, nor Virgil's, nor Cicero's, nor the boy's. It is due in the first place to such things as Becker's *Charicles*, Donaldson's *Theatre of the Greeks*, the 'As in præsenti,' the 'Propria quæ maribus,' and the rhymed *facetiæ* of the *Public School Latin Primer*. Who would not gladly forget these horrors? Who can think of them without a shudder? In the second place time used to be wasted—I dare say is wasted still—over dull writers like Cornelius Nepos, who has survived by an unfortunate accident, whom Quintilian does not condescend to mention, and whom Mr. Mackail charitably places in the 'outer fringe of literature.' Or boys are drilled through such a work as Ovid's *Fasti*, a sort of versified almanac, which Ovid wrote to show that he could versify anything.

Mr. Mackail has fallen into the too common error of comparing Tacitus with Carlyle. There is no real resemblance. 'Both authors,' says he, 'began by writing in the rather mechanical and commonplace style which was the current fashion during their youth.' That is so. But it constitutes no real similarity. Even among the writers of Latin, the tersest of languages, Tacitus is celebrated for his terseness. Carlyle, especially in his later days, was excessively verbose and diffuse. Tacitus was a statesman and a man of the world. Carlyle was a student and a recluse. To Tacitus literary finish was everything. To Carlyle it was nothing in theory from

the first, and nothing in practice at the last. Mr. Mackail would never have thought of such a parallel himself, and he should have followed his own instinct in at once discarding it. He has shown in an interesting way what a profound influence was exercised upon the prose of Tacitus by the poetry of Virgil. The modern or mediæval counterpart of Tacitus was, as Dean Milman long ago pointed out, Dante. It is never safe, nor is it consistent with sound criticism, to pick up some popular favourite of yesterday or the day before, and compare him with one of those intellectual giants whose work has survived in undiminished splendour the lapse of centuries, the revolution of creeds, the disappearance of the cause for which they struggled and even of the language in which they wrote. But the founder of Italian literature can be likened without a solecism to the greatest of Roman historians, and Milman in his *Latin Christianity* has drawn an ingenious list of the qualities common to the two. The sombre majesty of gloom in which they both enshrouded the universe, their contempt for all earthly things except genius and virtue, were accompanied in each by the terrible power of conferring an immortality of infamy in a phrase. There is something to be said for Galba as an emperor, and much for Celestine the Fifth as a Pope. But they have been known through the ages, and will be known to the end of time, the one as 'consensu omnium capax imperii nisi imperasset,' the other as the man 'che fece per viltà lo gran rifiuto.'

Mr. Mackail quotes four passages from Lucan, all of which are familiar, and something more than familiar, to every classical scholar. Lucan died in the reign of Nero, at the age of twenty-six. Mr. Mackail has not cited the best known line of his poem, and no one

places him in the first rank of Latin poets. These verses of Lucan—

> Nil actum credens dum quid superesset agendum,

and

> Nec sibi sed toti genitum se credere mundo,

and

> Iupiter est quodcunque vides, quocunque moveris,

belong to what, if not a universal language, is at least a universal literature. There is a curious and widespread delusion that the classics have shared the fate attributed by Lord Melbourne to religion. 'When I was young,' said that eminent nobleman, 'everybody was religious; now that I am old nobody is religious. Two great mistakes.' The idea that there was once a time when every one who had been through a public school and a University knew his Horace and his Virgil cannot be seriously maintained. The quotations of Carteret and Pulteney, of Pitt and Fox, of Brougham and Canning, of Peel and Stanley, of Gladstone and Lowe, were caviare to the general. But in cultivated society these things are as much appreciated as ever they were, while it is even possible now to mention them before Mrs. Boffin, such is the influence of Girton and Newnham. Macaulay describes a meeting with Brougham, in which 'this great scholar' declared that the name of the Greek dramatist might be pronounced Euripĭdes or Euripīdes at pleasure. 'It was Euripīdes in his Ainsworth.' One cannot imagine Sir William Harcourt, who resembles Brougham in the breadth of his knowledge and the variety of his accomplishments, making such an exhibition of himself as that. It was said by them of old time that a false quantity in a man is like a false step in a woman. Both may be due to a

defect, or an excess, of early training. No doubt a man may be, like Hamlet, too full of quotations. Macaulay felt this himself, and deplored it in a letter to Conversation Sharp.

> I feel (he says) a habit of quotation growing on me; but I resist that devil—for such as it is—and it flees from me. It is all that I can do to keep Greek and Latin out of all my letters. Wise sayings of Euripides are even now at my fingers' ends. If I did not maintain a constant struggle against this propensity my correspondence would resemble the notes to the *Pursuits of Literature*. It is a dangerous thing for a man with a very strong memory to read very much. I could give you three or four quotations this moment in support of that proposition, but I will bring the vicious propensity under subjection if I can.

All Macaulay's quotations are good, and the best is exquisite. But he did not waste them on the House of Commons, reformed or unreformed. Writing to his friend Ellis from Calcutta in 1835, he applies to the King's dismissal of the Whig Administration the language in which the Prometheus of Æschylus defies Zeus, characteristically adding that the Tories (he forgot Peel) could not understand it. What William the Fourth, against whom it was directed, would have made of it may be left to the license of conjecture. George the Fourth, however, found Denman's Greek quotation at the trial of Queen Caroline only too intelligible, and would never afterwards admit Denman to his presence. Even kings have their feelings, and the passage was undeniably strong.

As the art of skipping belongs to the art of reading, which is sadly incomplete without it, so writing or speaking without quotation is, at this stage of the world's history, a vain thing. The result in the one case is like Bradshaw, or Austin's *Jurisprudence*, in the other like an address from a leader of the Chancery Bar. Quotations are of two sorts, not including misquotations, which are far commoner, and of which there are, therefore, more

varieties. They may be frankly acknowledged, as by Burton. They may be adroitly hidden, as by Sterne. Terence found that in his time everything had been said, and so he addicted himself to adaptation from the Greek. Haughty time has been more than just to him, and it is he, not Menander, whom the boys of Westminster declaim. There are translations and translations. Keats read Homer in Chapman, and has more of the Greek spirit than Shelley, who was an excellent scholar. Emerson read Plato in Bohn, and his admirers consider the result satisfactory. Sometimes the translation, or paraphrase, supersedes the original, though the original be quite near to every one of us. Mr. Birrell, in a delightful essay on Dr. Johnson, praises highly, and yet not more highly than they deserve, those noble poems *London* and *The Vanity of Human Wishes*. But there was nothing in his eloquent eulogy from which it could have been inferred that any such man as Juvenal had ever existed in the world. Even Johnson in all his glory never wrote anything like the couplet—

> Summum crede nefas animam præferre pudori,
> Et propter vitam vivendi perdere causas,

nor the whole of the passage, beginning with 'Esto bonus miles,' to which it belongs. The foolish controversy of nearly two hundred years ago between the advocates of 'ancient' and 'modern' literature, now only remembered because Bentley contributed to it his *Phalaris*, and Swift his *Battle of the Books*, was essentially absurd. It naturally and inevitably produced such gems of criticism as the preference of Racine to Euripides, who was his model, and of Pascal to Plato, who resembled him in exactly the same way as Macedon resembles Monmouth. Pascal's Plato was Montaigne, the most profuse and unabashed of quoters. Montaigne wrote

when new books were scarce, and he put his whole life into a book. But if his book was, as he said to the King, himself, he was a part of all that he had read. That discursive and entertaining essay, which he cynically declared that he had written for fear his work should be neglected by ladies, bears the innocent title *On some Verses of Virgil.*

And, after all, what is originality? It is merely undetected plagiarism. The popular author who attributed the pronouncement 'Blessed are the meek' to George Eliot was doubtless an extreme instance of the easily deceived; but when Lord John Russell said that a distinguished opponent was 'conspicuous by his absence,' the question whether this was a bull was discussed for a long time before it was discovered by the maintainers of the affirmative that they were criticising Tacitus and not Lord John. Dean Gaisford, in his celebrated sermon upon verbs in $\mu\iota$, remarked that the acquisition of such knowledge as he had been imparting to his congregation would enable them to look down upon the profane vulgar with contented complacency.

> Despicere unde queas alios, passimque videre
> Errare, atque viam palantes quærere vitæ.

It is as unchristian to be proud of scholarship as of wealth, though perhaps not quite so vulgar. Yet even the Bible was written for intelligent people, and not for the preacher who commented on St. Paul's habit of using short words to describe violent action, as in 'If, after the manner of men, I have fought with beasts at Ephesus,' little suspecting, good, easy man, that the five words 'I have fought with beasts' are a translation, and an incorrect one, of the single Greek word $\grave{\epsilon}\theta\eta\rho\iota o\mu\acute{\alpha}\chi\eta\sigma\alpha$. Corporate pride is more justifiable than individual conceit. I dimly remember the delight in pupil room when

Lord Clarendon, who hated the public schools, cited a familiar line of Martial to the House of Lords in a novel and unexpected form.

Sunt bona, sunt quædam mediocria, sunt plura mala

was his version. Martial's is 'mala plura,' which avoids the unusual occurrence of two false quantities in as many words. Not the least felicitous of recent loans from the Greek is the tag from Sophocles inscribed on his title page by the tender and considerate biographer of Cardinal Manning. *πολλὰ τὰ δεινά,* it runs, *κοὐδὲν ἀνθρώπου δεινότερον πέλει.* 'There are many wonderful things, but nothing more wonderful than Manning,' is a free but not inappropriate rendering.

Mr. Purcell was a shining example of the 'grand old fortifying classical curriculum,' to which Mr. Bottles was a stranger. I hope Mr. Bottles is not forgotten. He 'was brought up,' as we learn from a valuable work of reference, at Lycurgus House Academy, Peckham. 'You are not to suppose from the name of Lycurgus that any Latin and Greek was taught in the establishment; the name only indicates the moral discipline and the strenuous earnest character imparted there. As to the inspiration, the thoughtful educator who was principal of the Lycurgus House Academy, Archimedes Silverpump, Ph.D., had modern views. 'We must be men of our age,' he used to say. 'Useful knowledge, living languages, and the forming of the mind through observation and experiment, these are the fundamental articles of my educational creed.' Or, as I have heard his pupil Bottles put it in his expansive moments after dinner, 'Original man, Silverpump! fine mind! fine system! None of your antiquated rubbish; all practical work; latest discoveries in science; mind constantly kept

excited; lots of interesting experiments; lights of all colours; fizz! fizz! bang! bang! That's what I call forming a man!'' I know Bottles, as well as he that made him. But the knowledge does not impress me, as perhaps it ought, with the futility of a classical education.

*April*, 1896.

# STERNE

It having been observed that there was little hospitality in London, Johnson: 'Nay, sir, any man who has a name, or who has the power of pleasing, will be very generally invited in London. The man Sterne, I have been told, has had engagements for three months.' Goldsmith: 'And a very dull fellow.' Johnson: 'Why, no, sir.'

One of my earliest recollections is a warning which I received from a country gentleman not to read too many books. 'For my part,' he said, 'I only read two books; but I read them over and over again. One is the Bible. The other is *Tristram Shandy*.' Apart from the absurdity of calling the Bible a book, and the indecorum of comparing sacred literature with profane, there is in the writings of Sterne no obvious inspiration from on high. But there are other qualities with which a mundane critic is naturally more competent to deal. Dr. Johnson, who knew better than to call Sterne dull, declared that *Tristram Shandy* would perish because it was odd, and nothing odd could live. *Tristram Shandy*, like Charles the Second, has been an unconscionably long time in dying. It would be an exaggeration to say that Mr. Disraeli was the last man who read *Rasselas*, or that no man living had read *Irene*. But references to these classical compositions would in the best educated company fall exceedingly flat, whereas Uncle Toby's sayings are as well known as Falstaff's, and the 'sub-acid humour' of Mr. Shandy plays, like the wit of Horace, round the cockles of the heart. It is now a pure curiosity of literature that men have lived who imputed

dulness to *Tristram Shandy*. Goldsmith, who was not altogether incapable of jealousy, denounced it in the *Citizen of the World* with a bitterness unsuitable to his character, and censured its violations of propriety in language of extraordinary grossness. Horace Walpole informed Sir David Dalrymple that he could not help calling it 'a very insipid and tedious performance,' in which 'the humour was for ever attempted and missed.' That is a description which might be applied by an unfavourable critic to Walpole's own letters, except that it is not easy to understand how, if humour is always missed, there can be any humour at all. 'The great humour,' adds this great critic, 'consists in the whole narrative always going backwards.' That is like the definition propounded by a budding naturalist to Cuvier, in which a crab was called a red fish that walks backwards. 'Your definition,' said Cuvier, 'would be perfect but for three facts: a crab is not red, it is not a fish, and it does not walk backwards.' Wordsworth thought that *Candide* was dull, and it is possible that Voltaire might have pronounced with more reason a similar judgment upon the *Ecclesiastical Sonnets*. As a straightforward and consecutive narrative of actual facts, duly set forth with appropriate comments, *Tristram Shandy* must be acknowledged, as Mr. Shandy said of the science of fortification, to have its weak points. Those who find it dull will probably find *The Caxtons* amusing, and I recommend them to try.

Mr. Percy Fitzgerald has rewritten his *Life of Sterne*, and has published some of Sterne's letters not previously printed. He has also reproduced the famous autograph contained in the fifth, seventh, and ninth volumes of the second edition of *Tristram Shandy*. When Sterne wrote for the public he was a purist in style, if not in morals.

When he wrote to ladies he was rhapsodical and in every sense of the word romantic. He corresponded with his male friends in a colloquial and rather slipshod fashion, which has nothing very characteristic about it except indomitable cheerfulness. Mr. Fitzgerald has disposed of Byron's charge that Sterne 'preferred whining over a dead ass to relieving a living mother.' The mother was an insatiable harpy, and Sterne did relieve her on many occasions. He was a good-natured if at bottom a selfish man. He behaved much better to his wife than Byron, which is not saying much, and was as fond of his daughter as Wilkes, which is saying a great deal. It is a strange notion that a man's private life becomes more interesting if he writes good prose or verse. The late Professor Freeman protested against setting up a Chair of English Literature at Oxford if it was only to mean 'chatter about Harriet'—that is, the first Mrs. Shelley. Chatter about Jenny—that is, Miss Fourmantel—is equally devoid of edification. It was rather a mean sort of economy on Mr. Sterne's part to use up his old love letters to Mrs. Sterne in addressing Mrs. Draper. Nor can the tone of his epistle to Lady Percy be held up for the imitation of the married and beneficed clergy. But, as Captain Shandy exclaimed, 'what is all this to a man who fears God?'

Sterne was forty-five when he began *Tristram Shandy*. He had lived since his youth chiefly in York and the immediate neighbourhood. The book was begun as a sort of local satire, in which the characters were well known and speedily recognised. What is the secret of its unfailing charm? There is no plot. There is no story. There is no method. There is no order, not even an alphabetical order, of which an eminent judge said that, though inferior to chronological order,

it was better than no order at all. There are only a few characters, some eccentric, others so broadly and typically human that one is startled by the familiarity and obviousness of their comments upon novel and unexpected events. Take, for instance, the scene in the kitchen at Shandy Hall when the news arrived of Bobby Shandy's death.

'My young master in London is dead,' said Obadiah. A green satin nightgown of my mother's, which had been twice scoured, was the first idea which Obadiah's exclamation brought into Susannah's head. Well might Locke write a chapter upon the imperfections of words. 'Then,' quoth Susannah, 'we must all go into mourning.' But note a second time: the word *mourning*, notwithstanding Susannah made use of it herself, failed also of doing its office; it excited not one single idea, tinged either with grey or black—all was green. The green satin nightgown hung there still. 'Oh! 'twill be the death of my poor mistress,' cried Susannah. My mother's whole wardrobe followed. What a procession! Her red damask, her orange-tawny, her white and yellow hat strings, her brown taffeta, her bone-laced caps, her bedgowns and comfortable under-petticoats—not a rag was left behind. '*No, she will never look up again*,' said Susannah. We had a fat, foolish scullion—my father, I think, kept her for her simplicity. She had been all autumn struggling with a dropsy. 'He is dead,' said Obadiah; 'he is certainly dead.' 'So am not I,' said the foolish scullion. 'Here is sad news, Trim!' cried Susannah, wiping her eyes as Trim stepped into the kitchen. 'Master Bobby is dead and buried.' The funeral was an interpolation of Susannah's. 'We shall have all to go into mourning,' said Susannah. 'I hope not,' said Trim. 'You hope not!' cried Susannah earnestly. The mourning ran not in Trim's head, whatever it did in Susannah's. 'I hope,' said Trim, explaining himself, 'I hope in God the news is not true.' 'I heard the letter read with my own ears,' answered Obadiah, 'and we shall have a terrible piece of work of it in stubbing the Oxmoor.' [Obadiah knew that Mr. Shandy had proposed to send Bobby abroad with the money originally intended for the moor.] 'Oh! he's dead,' said Susannah. 'As sure,' said the scullion 'as I'm alive.'

Then follows the famous digression upon the dropping of Trim's hat. '"Are we not here now," continued the corporal, "and are we not" (dropping his hat plump upon the ground, and pausing before he pronounced the word) "gone! in a moment?" The descent of the hat was as if a heavy lump of clay had been kneaded into the crown of it. "Had he flung it, or thrown it, or cast

it, or skimmed it, or squirted it, or let it slip or fall in any possible direction under heaven, or in the best direction that could be given to it . . . it had failed, and the effect upon the heart had been lost.'' Sterne goes on in a style rather more fantastic than usual to treat Trim's hat as the symbol of all declamatory eloquence and histrionic effect. Nearly a hundred years after the publication of *Tristram Shandy*, Richard Cobden and John Bright walked home together from the House of Commons. Mr. Bright had just made the great speech against the Crimean war, in which he exclaimed, 'The angel of death is abroad in the land. You can almost hear the beating of his wings.' It is one of the most justly celebrated passages in modern oratory. 'There was one moment,' remarked Cobden, 'when I trembled for you. If you had said "flapping" you would have been lost.' Whether Cobden had read *Tristram Shandy* or not, he understood the moral of Trim's hat.

A great French critic, the late M. Taine, in his spirited and ingenious history of English literature, dismisses Sterne with a few contemptuous pages. He could see nothing in him but the eccentric and grotesque. That is to miss the whole reason of Sterne's popularity and the whole source of his power. Dr. Johnson was right in his general principle, though wrong in his particular instance. Nothing merely odd does last. *Tristram Shandy* is not merely odd. Its oddity is on the surface. The author has ways and tricks which perplex some readers, and annoy others. But they are not of the essence of his work. They are superficial. What lies below is a profound knowledge of men and women, a subtle sympathy with human weakness, a consummate art of putting the great commonplaces of life in a form which makes them seem

original. 'Difficile est proprie communia dicere.' It is difficult, but it is worth doing, for the prize is literary immortality. M. Taine, who so thoroughly appreciated and so nobly expressed the genius of Swift, could see in Sterne only a writer who ended where he ought to have begun, who prosed upon the conjugal endearments of an elderly merchant and his wife, who had strange theories of trivial things, who dragged in legal pedantry and theological disputes and the jargon of the schools without reason or excuse. No such book could have lived a hundred and thirty-six years, or thirty-six without the hundred. It may be that, as Mr. Fitzgerald says, *Tristram Shandy* is more talked about than read. All the masterpieces of literature are. If every copy of *Tristram Shandy* were destroyed tomorrow its influence upon style and thought would remain. Sterne had one great quality besides humour in common with Swift. He wrote his own English. I sometimes doubt whether justice has ever yet been done to the simplicity and beauty of it. The *Sentimental Journey* and the fragment of Autobiography are almost perfect. The familiar description of the accusing spirit and the recording angel and Uncle Toby's oath would by the slightest blunder of taste have been made ridiculous, and the intrusion or even the misplacement of a word would have spoiled it. As it stands it is the admiration of every one who reads and the despair of every one who writes. The brief sketch of Uncle Toby's funeral, characteristically introduced in the middle of a book which leaves him perfectly well at the end of it, is a flawless and exquisite vignette in words. Sterne, like Swift, eschewed the mannerisms of his own age. There is hardly a phrase in *Tristram Shandy* or in *Gulliver's Travels* which would fix the date of either. They

wrote for posterity, and unlike the too famous ode, they have reached their address.

It is, perhaps, less strange that M. Taine should underrate Sterne than that Sterne should have become the rage in the Paris of Louis Quinze. Whatever may be said of the *Sentimental Journey* there is no more thoroughly English book than *Tristram Shandy*. But the Anglomania of 1760 was equal to anything, and the fine French ladies who thought Hume handsome found that Shandyism was just the thing to suit them. Sterne's own French seems to have been as bad as Lord Brougham's. But *Tristram Shandy* was translated as it came out, and the Parisians bought it, if they did not read it. Long afterwards Madame de Beaumont, whose humour was not her strong point, carried *Tristram Shandy* about with her among her favourite volumes in the strange company of Voltaire's *Letters* and the Platonic Dialogue which describes the death of Socrates. It was not all Anglomania or affectation. It was also a conclusive tribute to the universality of the book. We know the sources from which Sterne's characters were drawn. Uncle Toby was a compound of his own father, concerning whom he says, in the autobiography, that 'you might have cheated him ten times a day if nine had not been sufficient for your purpose,' and Captain Hinde, of Preston Castle, in Hertfordshire. Yorick is, of course, himself, or one side of himself, for there is a great deal of Sterne in Mr. Shandy. Mrs. Shandy is said, alas! to have been his wife. Eugenius was John Hall Stevenson, owner of Crazy Castle, which was unfortunately destroyed, and author of *Crazy Tales*, which have been unfortunately preserved. Ernulphus is Bishop Warburton, Dr. Slop is Dr. Burton, and so forth. These facts are not without their

interest, and it is still disputed, I believe, whether Dr. Burton was really a Roman Catholic, and whether he was actually upset in the mud. The industrious inquirer who set himself to discover whether the husband of the nurse in *Romeo and Juliet* was really a merry man, or whether she was deceived into thinking him so by affectionate partiality for his memory, belonged to a class more numerous than less energetic people might suppose. 'The best in this kind are but shadows, and the worst are no worse, if imagination amend them.' But the shadows outlast the substance. They are too immaterial to feel the hand of death. They are like the songs of the old Greek, *αἶσιν ὁ πάντων ἁρπακτὴρ Ἀΐδης οὐκ ἐπὶ χεῖρα βαλεῖ*. There is not much superficial resemblance between Laurence Sterne and Jane Austen; but both drew their characters from their own immediate and not remarkable surroundings. Both drew them in such a fashion that all classes of readers can equally enjoy them. The early editions of *Tristram Shandy* bore on the title page a motto from Aristotle which gives the key to the whole work. Men are troubled, said the philosopher, not by facts, but by opinions about facts. Charles Lamb used to call himself a matter of fiction man. Walter Shandy is the type and presentment of the speculative mind. Nothing strikes him as it strikes other people. He judges everything by reference to a theory, and his theories have no necessary connection the one with the other. Yet his unfailing humour shines through his pedantry and, except when he lies on the bed, saves him from appearing ridiculous.

Sterne laughed at his critics, and their successors have not forgiven him. Bishop Warburton, after extolling him, oddly enough, as the English Rabelais,

excommunicated him with bell, book, and candle, as Bishop Monk long afterwards did to Sydney Smith. The result in both cases was a deplorably easy triumph for the inferior clergy. Warburton lives as Ernulphus, and the *Divine Legation* is dead. Monk's *Euripides* reposes in the libraries of the curious. But everybody remembers him in connection with those 'cephalic animalculæ' protesting against the use of small-tooth combs. It is a dangerous thing to run across a man of genius before he is dead. When Boswell depreciated the *Dunciad* Johnson told him that he had missed his chance of immortality by coming too late into the world. Thackeray, who devoted half a lecture to abuse of Sterne, and many volumes to the sincerest form of flattering him, took him, if one may say so with all respect, by the wrong side. The laughter of fools, said the wise man in one of his wisest sayings, is like the crackling of thorns under a pot. To Mr. Thackeray, with his sensitive and beautiful reverence for the serious side of life, Sterne's laughter was hollow and his mockery hideous. Sterne's sentiment, which is no more exclusively Sterne's than it is Shakespeare's or Nature's, may be found in *Esmond* and *The Newcomes* as much as in the *Sentimental Journey* itself. The fascinating spirit of the eighteenth century, as perilous and attractive as the Hill of Venus in mediæval romance, is summed up in Sterne as in no other man. It was the century of Wesley as well as of Voltaire, and of Johnson as well as of Rousseau. Sterne and Wesley hardly seem to belong to the same species. We are not all made to understand each other. Voltaire, with his noble hatred of persecution and love of intellectual freedom, did undoubtedly sometimes direct the terrible engine of his ridicule against 'the last restraint of the powerful and the last hope of the wretched.'

Sterne did not. 'There never,' said Trim of his master, 'was a better officer in the king's army, or a better man in God's world,' and the character of Uncle Toby is a faithful portrait lovingly drawn. With the most substantial charge against Sterne's writings I must deal before I conclude. It cannot without affectation be ignored. But I claim for him, in spite of Mr. Thackeray, that the effect of his humour as of his eloquence, of his slightest sketches as of his most finished rhetoric, is to promote a large tolerance, a kindly sympathy, a broad humanity, and a rational justice.

The eighteenth century boasted itself to be the age of reason rather than the age of faith. Sterne poured contempt upon hypocrisy, upon pomposity, upon pretence, upon that peculiar carriage of the body which is adopted to conceal defects of the mind. He took, perhaps, rather too much interest in the relations of the sexes, and undervalued the conventional respectability which at one time earned for English society the applause of an admiring universe. But he hated cruelty, and meanness, and dishonesty, and malice. He knew that it was sentiment which separates man from beast. We cannot 'call up him who left half told the story of Cambuscan bold.' We cannot finish *Weir of Hermiston*, though it is not improbable that somebody will make the attempt. For my part I feel it even more difficult to bear the loss of that book which was never written, but which would have described Tristram's grand tour through Europe, 'in which, after all, my father (not caring to trust me with any one) attended me himself, with my uncle Toby, and Trim, and Obadiah, and, indeed, most of the family, except my mother, who being taken up with a project of knitting my father a pair of large worsted breeches (the thing is common

sense), and she not caring to be put out of her way, she stayed at home, at Shandy Hall, to keep things straight during the expedition.' One fragment only of this precious work survives to excite curiosity for ever, and leave it always unappeased. The scene is Auxerre.

'We'll go, Brother Toby,' said my father, 'whilst dinner is coddling, to the Abbey of St. Germain, if it be only to see those bodies of which Monsieur Sequier has given such a recommendation.' 'I'll go see anybody,' quoth my uncle Toby, for he was all compliance every step of the journey. 'Defend me!' said my father, 'they are all mummies.' 'Then one need not shave,' quoth my uncle Toby. 'Shave! no,' cried my father; ''twill be more like relations to go with our beards on.' So out we sallied, the corporal lending his master his arm and bringing up the rear, to the Abbey of St. Germain. 'Everything is very fine, and very rich, and very superb, and very magnificent,' said my father, addressing himself to the sacristan, who was a younger brother of the order of Benedictines; 'but our curiosity has led us to see the bodies, of which Monsieur Sequier has given the world so exact a description.' The sacristan made a bow, and lighting a torch first, which he had always in the vestry ready for the purpose, he led us into the tomb of St. Heribald. 'This,' said the sacristan, laying his hand upon the tomb, 'was a renowned prince of the house of Bavaria, who, under the successive reigns of Charlemagne, Louis le Débonnaire, and Charles the Bald, bore a great sway in the government, and had a principal hand in bringing everything into order and discipline.' 'Then he has been as great,' said my uncle, 'in the field as in the cabinet. I dare say he has been a gallant soldier.' 'He was a monk,' said the sacristan. My uncle Toby and Trim sought comfort in each other's faces, but found it not. My father clapped both his hands upon his waistcoat, which was a way he had when anything hugely tickled him; for though he hated a monk and the very smell of a monk worse than all the devils in hell, yet the shot hitting my uncle Toby and Trim so much harder than him, 'twas a relative triumph and put him into the gayest humour in the world. 'And pray what do you call this gentleman?' quoth my father rather sportingly. 'This tomb,' said the young Benedictine, looking downwards, contains the bones of St. Maxima, who came from Ravenna on purpose to touch the body——' 'Of St. Maximus,' said my father, popping in with his saints before him. 'They were two of the greatest saints in the whole martyrology,' added my father. 'Excuse me,' said the sacristan, ''twas to touch the bones of St. Germain, the builder of the abbey.' 'And what did she get by it?' said my uncle Toby. 'What does any woman get by it?' said my father. '*Martyrdom*,' replied the young Benedictine, making a bow down to the ground, and uttering the word with so humble but decisive a cadence it disarmed my father for a moment. ''Tis supposed,' continued the Benedictine, 'that St. Maxima has lain in this tomb four hundred years before her canonisation.' ''Tis but a slow rise, Brother Toby,' quoth my father, 'in this self-same

army of Martyrs.' 'A desperate slow one, an' please your Honour, said Trim, 'unless one could purchase.' 'I should rather sell out entirely,' quoth my uncle Toby. 'I am pretty much of your opinion, Brother Toby,' said my father.'

If *Tristram Shandy* were merely odd, this is just the sort of episode in it which would long ago have ceased to be read or to be readable. It is a digression upon a digression, if indeed terms of arrangement can be applied to a book which has none. It is a more flagrant violation of the unities than can be found even in Shakespeare, and to Shakespeare a man must go if he wants a purer piece of imperishable nature. Uncle Toby, 'all compliance through every step of the journey,' Mr. Shandy, whose 'remarks and reasonings upon the characters, the manners and customs of the countries we passed over were so opposite to those of all other mortal men, particularly those of my uncle Toby and Trim,' and Tristram silently observing for the future, make an even more delightful medley than that strange company which roamed through the best of all possible worlds under the guidance of M. Pangloss. This is the kind of passage which comment only spoils. But the 'relative triumph' of Mr. Shandy is the touch of a master. It supplies in two words the whole philosophy of popular preaching, in which the most hardened sinners will rejoice, because there is always some one else whom the shot hits so much harder than them. Sterne was not very respectful in his treatment of the Church of Rome. He played sometimes to the Protestant gallery, which still hated 'Papishes and wooden shoes.' But it is to be observed that on this visit to the Abbey of St. Germain the victory rests with the young Benedictine, who is not a humourist, nor a controversialist, but only a Christian gentleman. Sterne, like Swift, held very loosely to the dogmatic theology of his Church. But

both of them were too great to make a cheap reputation for wit out of sneers at religion. Swift turned all the tremendous powers of his savage irony against the shallow free-thinkers of his day, and 'that quality of their voluminous writings which the poverty of the English language compels me to call their style.' The one character in *Tristram Shandy* whom Sterne never allows to be made ridiculous is Uncle Toby, and Uncle Toby's rule of life is the Sermon on the Mount. His quaint simplicity, his native shrewdness, his instinctive preference of good and rejection of evil are more than a match for all the learning and all the subtlety of his brother. When Mr. Shandy, in an unusually tedious mood, had begun a discourse upon learned men's solutions of noses, and had been driven wild by the Captain's artless question, 'Can noses be dissolved?' he replied—

'Why, by the solutions of noses, of which I was telling you, I meant, as you might have known, had you favoured me with one grain of attention, the various accounts which learned men of different kinds of knowledge have given the world of the causes of long and short noses.' 'There is no cause but one,' replied my uncle Toby, 'why one man's nose is longer than other, but because that God pleases to have it so.' 'That is Grangousier's solution,' said my father. 'It is he,' continued my uncle Toby, looking up and not regarding my father's interruption, 'who makes us all, and forms and puts us together in such forms and proportions and for such ends as is agreeable to his infinite wisdom. . . . .'

'Now, whether we observe it or no,' continued my father (upon another occasion), 'in every sound man's head there is a regular succession of ideas, of one sort or other, which follow each other in train just like——' 'A train of artillery?' said my uncle Toby. 'A train of a fiddlestick!' quoth my father—'which follow and succeed one another in our minds at certain distances, just like the images in the inside of a lantern turned round by the heat of a candle.' 'I declare,' quoth my uncle Toby, 'mine are more like a smoke-jack.' 'Then, Brother Toby, I have nothing more to say to you upon the subject,' said my father.'

Mr. Fitzgerald has a strange theory that *Tristram Shandy* was written with great carelessness, and at headlong speed, resulting in a farrago of nonsense, illu-

minated by rare gleams of fancy and humour. This reminds me of the Buckinghamshire farmer who, after listening to a speech from his distinguished member at a market dinner, expressed the opinion that Mr. Disraeli was a very good man, but not at all clever. With all respect for Mr. Fitzgerald, I venture to affirm that *Tristram Shandy* is one of the most elaborate of human compositions, that there is not a sentence in it but Sterne well knew how it came there, and that its simplicity is the designed consequence of the highest art. Every one must have enjoyed or suffered the experience of forgetting a single line or even a single word in a great poem. The hopeless impossibility of supplying it by any other means than memory impresses upon the mind, like nothing else, what real poetry is.

> Oh, the little more, and how much it is,
> And the little less, and what worlds away!

There is much in *Tristram Shandy* which approaches the pedantic and borders on the dull. Take the Curse of Ernulphus; cut out of it the running comments of Uncle Toby and Mr. Shandy's famous shake of the head: forget that Dr. Slop had to read it through himself as a penalty for cursing Obadiah because he had cut his own thumb. The Curse of Ernulphus becomes about as interesting as an essay on Humour with the humour, as it usually is, left out.

It is said that when the Rev. Laurence Sterne preached as prebendary in York Minster many good people left the sacred edifice rather than sit under him. His sermons, including the one which Corporal Trim read, and broke down in reading because it reminded him of his brother Tom and the Inquisition, are not fervidly spiritual. Sometimes, as when he warns wives against pretending to moral or physical advantages,

the absence of which may be discovered in the first domestic scuffle, they may be reasonably suspected of a tendency to raise a laugh. It was, however, we are told, his life and not his sermons which scandalised his congregation. He kept bad company, such as his cousin Hall Stevenson and the Rev. Robert Lascelles, known as 'Panty,' from his supposed and unclerical resemblance to Pantagruel. Sterne would have done better to adopt a secular career. His cassock never fitted him, and to make love in bands is incongruous, especially for one who held that talking about love was not making it. But poor Sterne, with all his personal frailties, has been dead nearly a hundred and thirty years. Miss Fourmantel and Mrs. Draper were not difficult conquests. Sterne was, perhaps, not above enjoying *la fanfaronnade des vices qu'il n'avait pas*. We are concerned rather with his works than with him. Soundness of mind and goodness of heart are enshrined in the central figure of Sterne's masterpiece. At this time of day it is more important that one of the great writers of the world should have employed his genius upon the creation of Uncle Toby than that a clergyman of the Church of England should have written to a countess a letter which she should have destroyed.

There is no episode in Sterne's writings, not even the description of the dead ass, more hackneyed than the story of Le Fevre. It has been much exposed to penny readings, and the professional reciter has done his worst with it. But it remains unscathed, and it is worth all the pathetic scenes in Dickens put together. There is one touch in it peculiar to Sterne, and no more to be imitated than the thunderbolt of Jove. Trim is the narrator.

He did not offer to speak to me till I had walked up close to his bedside. 'If you are Captain Shandy's servant,' said he, 'you must

present my thanks to your master, with my little boy's thanks along with them, for his courtesy to me. If he was of Levens's ——' said the lieutenant. 'I told him your honour was.' 'Then,' said he, 'I served three campaigns with him in Flanders, and remember him; but 'tis most likely, as I had not the honour of any acquaintance with him, that he knows nothing of me. You will tell him, however, that the person his good nature has laid under obligations to him is one Le Fevre, a lieutenant in Angus's; but he knows me not,' said he a second time, musing. 'Possibly he may my story,' added he. 'Pray tell the Captain I was the ensign at Breda whose wife was most unfortunately killed with a musket shot as she lay in my arms in my tent.' 'I remember the story, an't please your honour,' said I, 'very well.' 'Do you so?' said he, wiping his eyes with his handkerchief; 'then well may I.' In saying this he drew a little ring out of his bosom, which seemed tied with a black riband about his neck, and kissed it twice. 'Here, Billy,' said he. The boy flew across the room to the bedside, and falling down upon his knee took the ring in his hand and kissed it too, then kissed his father, and sat down upon the bed and wept. 'I wish, said my uncle Toby with a deep sigh, 'I wish, Trim, I was asleep.'

Sterne often appears to be, though perhaps he never really is, diffuse. Certainly no one could say more, and not many could say so much, in a few words. Into *Tristram Shandy* he put himself, as Montaigne, who was sublimely diffuse, put himself into his essays. The sermons are perfunctory, and Dr. Johnson, no bad judge of the article, could not away with them. The *Sentimental Journey* is a perfect work of art. But, or rather and, it is all of a piece; it is a single record of fresh impressions. In *Tristram Shandy* are accumulated the experience, the meditations, the observant knowledge of many years. The eccentricity is in the treatment. The substance is elemental, and belongs to the broadest aspects of human nature. Sterne had an intense hatred of cruelty, of injustice, of hypocrisy, and of Puritanism. His religion was the sentimental Deism of the eighteenth century, and he had no abhorrence of the 'lighter vices.' In politics, though he affected, and perhaps felt, indifference to party, he was a mild Whig. Brought up among soldiers and loving them, as the characters of Uncle

Toby and Trim show that he did, he hated war, and especially wars of ambition.

> My father would often say to Yorick that if any mortal in the whole universe had done such a thing except his brother Toby, it would have been looked upon by the world as one of the most refined satires upon the parade and prancing manner in which Louis the Fourteenth from the beginning of the war, but particularly that very year, had taken the field. 'But 'tis not my brother Toby's nature, kind soul!' my father would add, 'to insult any one.'

Although Sterne was throughout his life the victim of weak health, and fled from death, as he himself said, through France and Italy, dying at last in the fifty-sixth year of his age, his spirits were indomitable and his pluck dauntless. No man could be more nobly serious upon themes that moved his admiration, his reverence, or his pity. But he saw many things in odd lights, and his sense of humour never slumbered, not even when it would have been better asleep. The secret of his style, which must, I cannot help thinking, have had some influence upon Newman's, is expressed in his own aphorism that writing is like conversation. Mr. Shandy was fanciful and fantastic, a devourer of musty rubbish which he mistook for literature, and, it must be added, of some good books along with the rest. But Mr. Shandy is a master of racy vernacular, and his most celebrated repartees are in monosyllables. Unlike Swift, Sterne was a student of Shakespeare, and once found himself under the necessity of explaining to a bishop that there were two Yoricks. This prelate—perhaps the same who declared that he did not believe a word of *Gulliver's Travels*—protested that he could not read sermons by the King of Denmark's jester.

Learned men, who find out everything in time, have made the discovery that Sterne was not original. Their ingenuity and industry are not less laudable because

they were anticipated by the candour of Sterne himself. He does not, indeed, mention Shakespeare. I suppose that in a treatise on photography one might assume the existence of the sun. But he speaks of his 'dear Rabelais, and still dearer Cervantes.' He quotes a whole heap of philosophers from Aristotle to Locke. 'Read, read, read,' he says, and of his own reading, if Captain Shandy will forgive such a use of the word, he makes a parade. And then we are gravely told by critics whose anti-Shandian beards we can spy under their mufflers, that he did not spin the whole of *Tristram Shandy* out of his own inside. The worthy and laborious Dr. Ferriar is actually at the pains to point out that when Mr. Shandy heard of the death of Bobby he quoted Bacon. He did indeed. He repeated nearly the whole of the Essay on Death, and he enriched it with an exquisite stroke. '"Cæsar Augustus died in a compliment." "I hope it was a sincere one," said my uncle Toby. "It was to his wife," replied my father.' Mr. Shandy, upon the same mournful occasion, while Susannah's mind wandered towards green satin, quoted also Plato, Cicero, and Sulpicius. Quotation was the breath of his nostrils. He was always quoting. Excellent Dr. Ferriar. But then Sterne did not get all his quotations at first hand. He made a reprehensible use of Burton's *Anatomy of Melancholy*. Sterne was not melancholy, and stood in no need of Burton's anatomical assistance. But he found a good deal of miscellaneous feeding in the famous collections of Democritus Junior, and Sterne was a miscellaneous feeder. Dr. Arnold thought it was wrong to appropriate another man's quotations, even if you verified them first. Dr. Arnold was a Puritan. Sterne was not, and it is likely enough that he sometimes omitted even the process of verification.

'What is that to any body?' as Uncle Toby asked when his brother tried to tell him how he came by his ideas. Molière, so Mr. Fraser Rae tells us, did not say, 'Je prends mon bien où je le trouve.' He said, 'Je reprends mon bien,' which is so legal as to be almost flat. But if Molière had said it he would have said a very good thing, and one which an original genius can afford to say. Sterne is not in the least like any of the writers he has been accused of pillaging. Some say that *Tristram Shandy* was suggested by the *Tale of a Tub*. It requires a more powerful imagination than I possess to understand the meaning of the statement. Both works might be included in a treatise on the coarseness of clergymen. But little could come of such a treatise, and it is to be hoped that none will ever be written. When Warburton called Sterne the English Rabelais, his episcopal colleagues, says Horace Walpole, did not know what he meant. The work of the Abbé of Meudon had not come their way. Sterne could speak out. George the Third would not suffer him to be promoted in the Church, and who can say that his Majesty was wrong? Queen Caroline would have enjoyed *Tristram Shandy*. One cannot imagine her grandson reading it aloud to Queen Charlotte. Sterne, however, risked nothing worse than the loss of a bishopric or a deanery. Rabelais might have been burnt. He wrote furtively and cryptically, wrapping his message to mankind in parables, in anecdotes, and in jokes. He was a passionate humanist, a lover of the classics, and a hater of monks. So much is clear enough to the most superficial reader. There is less profundity in *Tristram Shandy*, and no very definite purpose. Pedantry was ridiculous and cruelty odious before the time of Sterne, or of Rabelais. Goethe said of his own writings that a man who had

read and digested them would feel a stronger sense of freedom than before, and would be conscious of a wider range in permissible action. Sterne and Rabelais both harp on the hindrance of prudery and superstition, or, as some might say, religion and respectability, to the thorough enjoyment of life. Sterne was not a man of profound learning. He was a desultory, indiscriminate reader, and there are those who consider these adjectives to be epithets of abuse. He could hardly have been acquainted with the romance of Sir Thomas Malory, or he would not have made Mr. Shandy say that no one named Tristram had ever achieved any exploit in the world. The eighteenth century despised the Middle Ages, as may be seen in that detestable poem *La Pucelle*.

There is, I believe, an expurgated edition of *Tristram Shandy*, which begins with the sixth, or it may be with the seventh chapter. I do not know where it ends, nor what the same ingenious editor has done with the *Sentimental Journey*. The occasional impropriety of both works must be regretted, and cannot be denied. Every one knows the story of the lady whom Sterne asked whether she had read *Tristram Shandy*. 'No, Mr. Sterne,' said she, 'and, to be plain with you, I am told that it is not very fit for feminine perusal.' 'Pooh, pooh, ma'am, look at your child there, lolling on the carpet. He shows much that we conceal, but in perfect innocence, my dear ma'am, in perfect innocence.' Mr. Sterne's innocence was not perfect. It is always easy to condemn. It is often difficult to distinguish. There are passages in Sterne of which one can only say that while it would be coarse to print them now, it was not coarse to print them then. That, however, is not an exhaustive account of the matter, and does not meet the gravest part of the charge. Sterne treated delicate

subjects, and a delicate subject may be defined, for want of a better definition, as one which lends itself to indelicate treatment. By what standard and by what rules is a book like *Tristram Shandy* to be judged? Mr. Ruskin once complained that he was hampered in his moral and religious teaching (though no one would have suspected it) because he could not address the British public as frankly believing or frankly disbelieving in a future life. It does not seem easy to ascertain what the accepted view of indelicacy in literature is. When M. Zola did us the honour of visiting London, a brilliant assemblage, largely composed of fashionable ladies, gathered in the hall of a learned society to hear the gospel according to the author of *Nana*. The English translator of M. Zola's works was, if I remember rightly, at the same time languishing in a dungeon for the offence of too faithfully translating them. If *Tristram Shandy* were veiled in the obscurity of the French language, no apology might be necessary for it. But there is between Sterne and Zola a difference deeper and wider than nationality. M. Zola has no humour. He deals with vice in deadly earnest, and without any reserve. When Sterne departs from conventional propriety it is always to raise a laugh, and never for any less avowable purpose. There is nothing so serious as passion, and laughter is quite incompatible with prurience. Thackeray contrasts the impurity of Sterne with the purity of Goldsmith. Goldsmith wrote two stanzas which are quite as indecent as anything in Sterne, and not in the least amusing. 'It cannot be said,' wrote Sir Walter Scott, who had surely, among all great men of letters, the soundest and healthiest mind, 'it cannot be said that the licentious humour of *Tristram Shandy* is of the kind which applies itself to the passions, or is calculated to corrupt society.

But it is a sin against taste, if allowed to be harmless as to morals. A handful of mud is neither a firebrand nor a stone; but to fling it about in sport argues coarseness of mind and want of common manners.' For his sin against taste Sterne has paid the penalty. He has alienated and repelled many of the readers who would best appreciate his humanity, his pathos, and his eloquence. If any man cares to see what Shandean license can be without the great qualities which in Sterne's case redeem it, let him dip—he need do no more—into Hall Stevenson's *Crazy Tales*, which were once thought vastly witty and entertaining. A man and his work must be tried by contemporary comparison. But I do not know that a generation which reads *La Terre* can afford to hold up the hands of horror at the intricacies of Diego and Julia.

There are some things in *Tristram Shandy* which would be better away. 'The knowledge of evil is not wisdom.' The tale of Slawkenbergius is tedious, and has happily ceased to be intelligible. Rhinology may not have been more absurd than phrenology, but it is more completely forgotten. The tale of the Abbess of Andouillets is low, gross, and stupid. But with these two exceptions there is hardly a dull page in *Tristram Shandy*. There is, moreover, this to be said for it, that the more innocent the reader, the more innocent the book. M. Zola, who has, as Dr. Pusey said of Lord Westbury and eternal punishment, a personal interest in the question, argues that a book can no more be immoral than a mathematical demonstration or a musical composition. Morality is a quality of human beings and not of books. It may be suspected that a fallacy lurks in this generalisation. It is only as the work of man that books can be regarded as immoral. The

essence of *Tristram Shandy*, as distinguished from its separable and inseparable accidents, is the triumph of moral simplicity and mother wit over metaphysical subtlety and undigested learning. But the fight is well sustained. Mr. Shandy is a man of great natural capacity and well able to hold his own in various companies against all comers. He is always, in his own favourite word, 'argute,' and it is no easy task to dispose of his polemics. Sterne was too genuine an artist to make Mr. Shandy a weak-minded man, to put up a nine-pin for the sake of knocking it down. Uncle Toby's questions and comments appear obvious enough; but no other writer could have made him pour them with such deadly and destructive effect upon the speculative performances of his brother. Any serious description of *Tristram Shandy* is, however, so inadequate as to be almost grotesque. Those who do not feel the charm of the book cannot be taught it, and those who feel it resent being told what it is. It is impalpable and indefinable, like one of those combinations of colour at sunset for which there are no words in the language and no ideas in the mind. There have been few greater masters of conversation than Sterne, and in what may be called the art of interruption no one has ever approached him. He is among the makers of colloquial English, and thousands who never heard of Shandy Hall repeat the phrases of the Shandy brothers. Of all English humourists, except Shakespeare, Sterne is still the greatest force, and that the influence of Parson Yorick is not extinct may be seen in almost every page of the *Dolly Dialogues*.

*December*, 1896.

## GIBBON'S LIFE AND LETTERS

The most famous of autobiographies is, in one sense of the word, patchwork. Gibbon wrote the history of the Roman Empire, or of its decline and fall, once. He wrote the history of himself, or of his rise and progress, seven times. One of these narratives is the merest fragment, so that they are usually called six. Gibbon died very suddenly and unexpectedly in his fifty-seventh year. He had not made up his mind whether he would publish his own Memoirs in his own lifetime, though it seems, in spite of some natural hesitation on his part, most probable that he would have done so. After his death his intimate friend, the first Lord Sheffield, assisted by his daughter, Miss Holroyd—'the Maria,' as Gibbon calls her—afterwards Lady Stanley of Alderley, arranged and edited the book which has fascinated three generations. It is due to Lord Sheffield's memory to say that he practised no deception on the public. In his advertisement to the first edition of Gibbon's Miscellaneous Works, dated the 6th of August, 1795, he says: 'The most important part consists of Memoirs of Mr. Gibbon's Life and Writings, a work which he seems to have projected with peculiar solicitude and attention, and of which he left six different sketches, all in his own handwriting. . . . From all of these the following Memoirs have been carefully selected and put together.' It is impossible for any one familiar with these old volumes to read the sumptuously complete edition of

*Gibbon's Life and Letters* now published by Mr. Murray and not be struck by Lord Sheffield's literary skill, Mr. Murray's edition cannot be too highly praised. It contains hundreds of new letters, besides all the seven versions of the Life. Mr. John Murray has himself performed the useful service of printing and explaining some brief and often enigmatical jottings appended to the Autobiography by its author. Mr. Rowland Prothero has enriched the Letters with a most interesting series of notes, which are always full enough and never too full. The present Lord Sheffield, the grandson of Gibbon's friend, acknowledges in a modest preface the assistance and encouragement he has received from Mr. Frederic Harrison, to whom, indeed, the appearance of these volumes is really due. The whole of the reading public, as well as Lord Sheffield, are deeply in Mr. Harrison's debt. Whatever literary treasures the year 1897 may have in store, even if they should include 'some precious, tender-hearted scroll of pure' Bacchylides, they will contain nothing of profounder interest or more permanent value than this splendid picture of Gibbon painted by himself.

Nevertheless, I adhere to my opinion that the first Lord Sheffield and his daughter did their work exceedingly well. Lord Sheffield, though an active, zealous, bustling politician, must have been a man of scholarly taste and trained judgment. It is more than interesting to see how Gibbon began, and altered, and erased, and began again, the counterfeit presentment of the person he most admired. But the Autobiography as known to the public for nearly a hundred years is really his, and its artistic perfection is due to the conscientiousness as well as to the ability of the editors.

'The Maria's' own letters, so recently published

are not at all in the Gibbonesque vein. When Mr. Gibbon described them as 'incomparable,' he used the language not of criticism, but of affection. They are forcible enough. 'It is too hot to swear any more,' she ingenuously remarks at the end of one of them, which was not, however, addressed to the historian. They abound in vigour and in high spirits, which are the most enviable if the least interesting of human characteristics. But their chief value is in their sketches of 'Gib,' and they should be read, irreverent as they are, in connexion with these volumes. 'Mr. G.,' as in unconscious anticipation of another hero and another age she sometimes writes, was very much at home in Sheffield Place. He liked to be alone with the family. He hated country visitors and country dinner-parties, and the business or amusements of a country gentleman's life. 'I detest your races, I abhor your assizes,' he wrote to Lord Sheffield. He was a sworn enemy to exercise, and when his hat was removed he did not miss it for a week. If he was not reading, he liked to sit in an arm-chair and talk, while Lady Sheffield listened, and Maria yawned or informed Miss Firth in a confidential note that she was a 'D. of a cat.'

Mr. Gibbon was much interested in his antecedents, if I may for once use that word in its proper sense. He wanted to know all about everyone who had been directly or indirectly concerned in bringing him into the world. He would gladly have been richer, and few men valued money more. But it was a satisfaction to him to think that the fortune which might have been his had been swallowed up in no less conspicuous a misfortune than the South Sea Bubble. He rejoiced in an ancestor who had been Bluemantle Pursuivant, and even studied the principles of heraldry, which Mr. Lowe used to say was

the only branch of knowledge not worth studying. The seventh and by far the briefest of the Autobiographical Sketches contains two famous genealogical passages, one of which appears in the History, and would have immortalised Henry Fielding if Fielding had not immortalised himself. Everybody knows the gorgeous sentence, 'The successors of Charles the Fifth may disdain their humble brethren of England, but the romance of *Tom Jones*, that exquisite picture of human manners, will outlive the palace of the Escurial and the Imperial Eagle of the House of Austria.' It is a real triumph of rhetoric to have surrounded with so grandiose a setting so homely a name. Equally familiar is another passage in the same sketch and almost in the same paragraph: "The nobility of the Spencers has been illustrated and enriched by the trophies of Marlborough; but I exhort them to consider the *Faery Queen* as the most precious jewel of their coronet.' It does not, however, appear that Gibbon 'mocked at the claims of long descent,' even when they failed to include a novelist or an epic poet. He was proud of his real or supposed connexion with Lord Saye and Sele, the victim of Jack Cade, 'a patron and a martyr of learning.' But if the Shakespearean holder of that most picturesque title had been neither a martyr nor a patron, I think he would still have found a place in the Autobiography. Mr. Gibbon was fond of playing at the philosopher with human weaknesses. He calls a coat of arms the most useless of all coats, and he emphatically asserts his right to use one. He might be suspected of trifling if he ever trifled with so solemn a subject as himself. Even his ancestry is not sacred to the shafts of his wit. 'Our alliances by marriage,' he says in a passage of the Autobiography suppressed by the sensitive delicacy of Miss Firth's

correspondent, 'our alliances by marriage it is not disgraceful to mention. . . . The *Memoirs of the Count de Grammont*, a favourite book of every man and woman of taste, immortalise the Whetnalls or Whitnells of Peckham: "la blanche Whitnell et le triste Peckham." But the insipid charms of the lady and the dreary solitude of the mansion were sometimes enlivened by Hamilton and love, and had not *our* alliance preceded *her* marriage, I should be less confident of my descent from the Whetnalls of Peckham.' There can be no doubt that Gibbon liked to consider himself, in the technical or heraldic sense of the term, a gentleman. Macaulay held the sound and wholesome doctrine that any connexion with English history was better than none. His illustrious predecessor went further, and loved his pedigree for its own sake. Family pride cannot be justified by reason, and the habitual display of it is an intolerable nuisance. But it has one practical advantage. It is a safeguard, for want of a better, against that abject prostration of intellect before rank which is one of the most painful and degrading spectacles that society affords.

Gibbon must have been one of the oddest boys that ever were seen, if indeed he ever was a boy. The sole survivor of a large and sickly progeny, his childhood was one round of diseases, and of remedies compared with which the diseases must have been almost agreeable. His mother died when he was very young, he did not get on with his father, he was miserable at Westminster, and his aunt, Mrs. Porten, who may be said to have saved his life, was the only friend of his infancy. His contempt for 'the trite and lavish praise of the happiness of our boyish years' is not therefore surprising. But Lord Sheffield or 'the Maria' need not have cut out

the quaint and characteristic remark, 'The Dynasties of Assyria and Egypt were my top and cricket-ball.' Nor is it easy to understand why the Marian pencil should have been drawn through this noble panegyric: 'Freedom is the first wish of our heart; freedom is the first blessing of our nature; and, unless we bind ourselves with the voluntary chains of interest or passion, we advance in freedom as we advance in years.' The freedom which Mr. Gibbon extolled, or at least the freedom which he supported, was of a peculiar and limited type. It was the freedom of a few highly intelligent and cultivated persons to express themselves as they pleased about the prejudices or convictions of their neighbours. This is no doubt an essential part of freedom. But it is not the whole. Nor is it that which appeals most strongly to the masses of mankind. For the masses indeed, as we understand them, Gibbon cared little or nothing. Except so far as they supplied him with honest valets and cleanly housemaids, they were all included in the odious term 'mob.' He would not have persecuted them. He was all for letting them go to the devil in their own way. He never came in contact with them, except when he served in the Militia, and then he messed with the officers. Both the constitutencies he represented in the House of Commons, Liskeard and Lymington, were pocket boroughs. On the 7th of December, 1763, he wrote to his stepmother: 'I was very glad to hear of my friend [*sic*] Wilkes's deserved chastisement, and if the law could not punish him, Mr. Martin could.' Considering that Martin, whom Wilkes never injured, had deliberately provoked Wilkes to a duel after shooting at a mark for weeks, and that if Wilkes had been killed, instead of badly wounded, Martin would have been morally as well as legally guilty

of murder, this is one of the strangest expressions of friendship on record. Gibbon's hatred and dread of the French revolution, which menaced his repose at Lausanne, knew no bounds; and the most unpleasant passage in his Autobiography is the one in which he suggests that Dr. Priestley's 'trumpet of sedition' should be silenced by the civil magistrate. Mr. Bagehot drily observes that Gibbon felt himself to be one of those persons whom the populace always murdered. He said, however, at the time of Lord George Gordon's riot, that he did not think he was obnoxious to the people. It was the people who were obnoxious to him. He voted steadily for the American war.

Lord Sheffield's or Miss Holroyd's omissions have an historic interest of their own. One of them curiously attests the fame of Adam Smith. Mr. Gibbon, in citing the testimony of that distinguished man to the deplorable condition of Oxford, calls him a philosopher. This was not good enough for Lord Sheffield, who substituted 'a master of moral and political wisdom.' Gibbon prided himself upon not being disgusted by 'the pedantry of Grotius or the prolixity of Puffendorf.' Lord Sheffield would not suffer the name of Gibbon to be associated with such shocking opinions as that Puffendorf was prolix and Grotius pedantic. It was more reasonable in an editor and more pious in a friend to expurgate Gibbon's account of his second visit to Lausanne, which was paid in 1763. 'The habits of the militia,' says the historian, 'and the example of my countrymen betrayed me into some riotous acts of intemperance, and before my departure I had deservedly forfeited the public opinion which had been acquired by the virtues of my better days.' This sentence exhibits Gibbon in a new light. The future author of the *Decline and Fall* drunk

and disorderly is a subject which only the brush of Hogarth could have adequately portrayed. Perhaps no man throughout his life had more perfect self-control than Gibbon, and I cannot help suspecting him of a design to show the people of Lausanne that he could get drunk as well as the worst of them. It was probably the last time. Moral scruples had never much weight with him; but drink interfered with study, and drink had to give way. When he first went to Lausanne, dulness drove him to the gambling table. But he lost his money, and his aunt would not send him any more, and it was disagreeable to be without money, and so he left off gambling. The letter to Mrs. Porten, which did not melt her hard heart, is thus pleasantly endorsed by his step-mother, or 'mother-in-law,' as she calls herself. 'Please remember that this letter was not addressed to his mother-in-law, but his aunt, an old cat as she was to refuse his request.' But the old cat knew what she was about, and so did her nephew. The discipline was salutary and effectual. It is difficult to read of Gibbon in his teens, or even in his twenties, without being reminded of that masterly creation, the 'Wise Youth Adrian' in *The Ordeal of Richard Feverel.*

On the point of his health Gibbon showed an indifference which was positively sublime. In 1761, when he was twenty-four, he consulted Mr. Cæsar Hawkins, afterwards Sir Cæsar Hawkins, the eminent surgeon, about some rather bad symptoms. Hawkins took a serious view of the case, and told him to come again. The next time he consulted a surgeon was in November, 1793, and in January, 1794, he died. But in the meanwhile he had written his History and enjoyed his life. When, in 1783, he found that the

distractions of London society, which he thoroughly enjoyed, were impeding the progress of his book, he turned his back on London, and buried himself with Deyverdun at Lausanne. He amused himself with fine ladies, and liked to be considered a dangerous man. His comical indignation with M. Necker for treating him as harmless and leaving him alone with Madame Necker was probably only half assumed. But for all the fine ladies of his acquaintance put together he did not care one rap of his snuff-box. He knew what they were worth, he knew what he was worth, and he governed himself accordingly. One of his favourites was Lady Elizabeth Foster, once so famous in the flesh, now so celebrated on canvas, who became at last the Duchess of Devonshire. It was of her Mr. Gibbon said that if she were to beckon the Lord Chancellor from the woolsack in full view of the public he would be compelled to follow her. To her face, so he tells us, he called her Bess. Behind her back he called her a 'bewitching animal,' and with this elegantly murderous label he consigned her to her appropriate niche in some odd corner of his mind.

But fine ladies were not the only persons to whom Mr. Gibbon was indifferent. For his mother he could not be expected to feel much fondness. Some reflections on the death of his father were kindly omitted by Lord Sheffield. 'The tears of a son,' says the filial chronicler, 'are seldom lasting.' 'Few, perhaps,' he adds, 'are the children, who, after the expiration of some months or years, would sincerely rejoice in the resurrection of their parents.' This is cynicism in the literal meaning of the word. It resembles rather the natural shamelessness of the dog than the acquired indifference of the philosopher. Mr. Gibbon senior was certainly not a

model father. He did not act wisely in sending his son to Oxford at fourteen, nor, in spite of consequences he could not have anticipated, in sending him at fifteen to Switzerland. He seems to have been rather cantankerous, and he spent a good deal of money which Mr. Gibbon junior would much rather have handled himself. But a father's grave is an odd receptacle for bad imitations of La Rochefoucauld. Most of the few letters in these volumes were addressed to this unlamented parent's second wife, born Dorothea Patton. She was devotedly attached to her stepson, and he professed the most affectionate regard for her. But she had a jointure of three hundred a year charged upon his estate, and he occasionally betrays in his letters to Lord Sheffield some anxiety to know how long she was likely to need it. She survived this anxious inquirer, and their friendly relations were only interrupted by his death. But the one blessing which her stepson did not desire for her was longevity. The other obstacle to Mr. Gibbon's possessing that opulence of which Madame Necker declared to him to be an *adorateur zélé* was treated in a much more summary manner. 'Aunt Hester,' or the 'Northamptonshire Saint,' was the favourite butt of Mr. G.'s sarcastic raillery. He could not away with her, and he did not conceal his impatience for adding her income to his own. His inquiries after her health were frequent without being affectionate. He desired to be informed from a sure source without noise or scandal of her 'decline and fall.' He charged her with reversing the proper relations between nephews and aunts by attempting to borrow money from him. He described her as having retired to the house, 'he durst not say to the arms,' of Mr. Law, author of the *Serious Call*. He accused her of an inconsistent reluctance to

begin chanting hallelujahs in Heaven. But about his feelings for this lady there was no disguise. He did not make her continued existence the topic of felicitations to herself and of regrets to others. She had the decency to die before him.

Mr. Gibbon was never rich and never poor. He realised, though it is to be feared that he never uttered, the prayer of Agar, 'Give me neither poverty nor riches, feed me with food convenient for me, lest I be full and deny Thee, and say, who is the Lord? or lest I be poor and steal, and take the name of my God in vain.' He never had any profession, though for three years, from 1779 to 1782, he drew a substantial salary as a Lord of Trade. A foreigner might pause to observe that Mr. Gibbon was not a lord, and knew nothing of trade. An Englishman will rather be astonished that an anomaly so thoroughly English should, through the economic zeal of Mr. Burke, have been abolished more than a century ago. Mr. Gibbon accepted, with fortitude, the loss of an office which no successor could enjoy, and in 1783 retired to Lausanne. He was an epicure as well as an Epicurean, and never affected to despise the pleasures of the table. His theory of the merits of the middle state, now published for the first time, is extremely interesting, and would have aroused the furious antagonism of Dr. Johnson. 'Few works of merit and importance have been executed either in a garret or in a palace. A gentleman possessed of leisure and independence, of books and talents, may be encouraged to write by the distant prospect of honour and reward; but wretched is the author, and wretched will be the work, where daily diligence is stimulated by daily hunger.' Gibbon did not seriously think that the work of Johnson, of Goldsmith, or of Porson, to take three of his own

contemporaries, was wretched. He knew that Marcus Aurelius was an emperor in name as Julius Cæsar had been in fact, and that Epictetus, like Plautus, was a slave. He could have cited scores of exceptions to his own rule. But perhaps there is no rule. Certainly no rule will account for Gibbon himself. Not even that colossal intellect, allied with that gigantic industry, can prevent the design and completion of the *Decline and Fall* within a quarter of a century from being the eighth wonder of the world. Gibbon had little education except what he gave himself. No Oxford man, and no Old Westminster, owed less to Westminster or to Oxford. The 'monks of Oxford,' steeped in 'port and prejudice,' took no notice of him until he was received into the Church of Rome, and then washed their hands of him. He was his own teacher and his own pupil, which seemed to have doubled the power of his extraordinary mind. 'Such as I am,' he wrote, and Lord Sheffield suppressed, 'such as I am, in genius or learning, or manners, I owe my creation to Lausanne; it was in that school that the statue was discovered in the block of marble; and my own religious folly, my father's blind resolution, produced the effects of the most deliberate wisdom.' Sainte-Beuve, the prince of modern critics, pronounces the impartial judgment that Gibbon's too early and complete familiarity with the French language corrupted the idiomatic purity of his English. Mr. Gibbon's first book, an essay on the Study of Literature, was written in French, and he had actually begun a French History of Switzerland, when David Hume, who hated and despised England with the grotesque intensity of a Gallicised Scot, judiciously advised him to adopt in future the lingo of the barbarians. The Gallicisms gradually,

though never perhaps completely, disappeared from Gibbon's writing, and they cannot be said to have permanently injured his style. But there is some truth in his own statement that at Lausanne he ceased to be an Englishman. Nor did the Hampshire Militia and the House of Commons ever quite restore or impart the national character. He remained a citizen of the world, bilingual, unprejudiced, or at least prejudiced only against professions of patriotism. There is no affectation in his statement that the militia as well as Parliament taught him valuable lessons. It was a real training that militiamen had in those days. Gibbon did not much like it, or, to use his own more accurate expression, he felt heartily glad when it was over. But all his life he was a thorough scholar. On the surface a man of pleasure and fashion, he never wasted his time. A voracious, omnivorous, incessant reader, he did not seek instruction only from books. There was something to be learnt by drilling in Hampshire, and he learned it. He acquired a knowledge of military terms and of local administration. There was much to be learnt in the House of Commons, and he learned it. He saw how the British Constitution, 'the thing,' as Cobbett afterwards called it, actually worked, and Blackstone, whom he diligently studied, could not teach him that. He never spoke, probably because he was afraid of not speaking so well as some of his inferiors. But he listened, and he assured the world that Burke's speeches were reported as they had been dilivered, by which he meant that they were delivered as they had been composed. His politics were indefinite, and in truth he cared very little about them. He called himself a Whig. He usually, though not always, voted with the Tories. He delighted in Lord North's good humour

and ready wit.* He paid a noble tribute to the personal character of Charles Fox. For himself, he only asked of Parliament and people what Diogenes asked of Alexander, that they would stand out of his light.

It was at Lausanne, as all the world has heard, that Gibbon finished his History, and took that famous walk under the acacias which he himself has described with such rare and moving simplicity. It was also at Lausanne, many years earlier, that he met Mademoiselle Curchod, who became Madame Necker. Their brief engagement was not a time of unalloyed bliss, and the assistance of no less a personage than Rousseau was invoked to mediate between the parties. But the author of *La Nouvelle Héloïse* was unfavourable to the pretensions of *le nouveau Abélard*. He thought Mr. Gibbon too cold-blooded a young man for his taste, or for the lady's happiness. In affairs of the heart Jean Jacques was a good judge. Mr. Gibbon's subsequent praise of Mademoiselle Curchod's virtuous pride in poverty and Madame Necker's graceful dignity in high station is the language of a philosopher and a gentleman. But it is as cold as Cadenus and Vanessa, which is as cold as a stone. Madame Necker sometimes amused herself in later life by teasing her tepid suitor. But with truly feminine benevolence she advised him, as he could not marry her, on no account to marry anybody else. Within the small circle of the very few people for whom he really cared Gibbon was the warmest and truest of friends. There are few morsels of English literature more pleasant to read than his letters to Lady Sheffield, whom, as he says, he loved like a sister for twenty years. When he heard of her death in 1793, he did not hesitate for a

* 'The noble Lord is even now slumbering on the ruins of the Constitution.' 'I wish to God I was.'

moment. He had projected a visit to Sheffield Place, which he might or might not have paid. He was perfectly comfortable in his house at Lausanne, and he had satisfied himself that the French, with or without breeches, were not coming to annoy him. He was obese, and physically indolent, and shrank from exertion. But he felt that his proper place was by the side of Lord Sheffield. The only consolation in such circumstances, he said, was to be found in the sustaining presence of a real friend, and he set off for England at once. Ten years earlier he had left London for Lausanne at the invitation of his friend Deyverdun, with whom he lived in unbroken intimacy till Deyverdun's death. A passionless nature Mr. Gibbon may have had, but it must have been also a singularly amiable one.

'I will not dissemble the first emotions of joy on the recovery of my freedom, and perhaps the establishment of my fame.' Throughout his life Gibbon thoroughly understood his own position. As a man of letters he had no vulgar vanity. But his self-reliance and self-confidence were never disturbed. No such work as the *Decline and Fall*, if indeed there be such another, was ever more completely due to one imperial mind. 'Not a sheet has been seen by any human eyes except those of the author and the printer.' Half the History was composed in London, and the other half in Switzerland. But alike in 'the winter hurry of society and Parliament' and in 'the comforts and beauties of Lausanne' the historian serenely kept the even tenour of his way. Most of his critics he justly despised. Compliments, with a few exceptions, poured off him like water off a duck's back. He welcomed the praise of Porson, despite its 'reasonable admixture of acid,' because he appreciated the value of Porson's opinion. He prized

the compliment of Sheridan to his 'luminous page,' because it was paid him 'in the presence of the British nation' at the trial of Warren Hastings.* But when the public discovered his merits, he congratulated the public, and he scarcely pretended to doubt the finality of his work. Very few of his letters allude to his historical researches. He was a solitary and an uncommunicative worker. Most of his acquaintances in London were indeed about as capable of understanding what he was at as His Royal Highness the Duke of Gloucester, who greeted the second volume of the History as 'another damned thick square book,' and accosted the author with: 'Scribble, scribble, scribble, eh, Mr. Gibbon?' The Duke of Gloucester, however, was in this respect a Solon or a Solomon compared with Horace Walpole, who expressed to the historian his regret that so clever a man should write on so dull a subject. Appreciation of the *Decline and Fall* was not to be expected from Walpole. One might as well look for grapes from thorns or figs from thistles. But if he had been able to play with decency even his own poor part as a parasite of letters, he would have felt that that was not the sort of thing to say. It is difficult to suppose that Gibbon was quite sincere when he repudiated the presumption of claiming a place, along with Hume and Robertson, in the triumvirate of British Historians. Robertson is entitled to the most futile of all commendations. He ought to be read. If Hume's fame rested upon his *History of England*, and not, as it does, on the *Treatise of Human Nature*, he would never be mentioned in the same breath with Gibbon. M. Guizot, as

* Mr. Fraser Rae in his invaluable biography has disposed of the absurd story that Sheridan said, or said he said, 'voluminous.' A voluminous page! Gibbon, in obvious reference to this anecdote, explained by Mr. Rae, speaks of his 'voluminous pages' in the plural.

is well known, read Gibbon three times with very different impressions. After the first perusal, which must have been a hurried one, he thought his author brilliant but superficial. After the second his verdict was 'Sound in principle, but weak in detail.' The third left him with little but admiration to express. Considering the extent of M. Guizot's own historical knowledge and the rigid orthodoxy of his religious opinions, this is a striking testimonial. Macaulay bestows cold though high praise upon his illustrious predecessor. Among historians he put Thucydides first and all the others nowhere. 'The rest one may hope to rival: him never.' Thucydides is, indeed, unsurpassed and unsurpassable. But between him and Gibbon there is no common ground of comparison. You cannot, as the old saying is, add four pounds of butter to four o'clock. Thucydides wrote the account of a war between two Greek States, in which he was personally concerned. That he enriched his narrative with a masculine eloquence and a ripe knowledge of human affairs is not to the purpose. Such a work cannot be compared, cannot with any useful result be even contrasted, with the fall of an empire related a thousand years after it fell. Gibbon's History has never been rivalled. Nor, in spite of Lord Acton's grand project, is it ever likely to be.

Lord Sheffield survived Gibbon twenty-seven years, so that he had plenty of time for dealing with the historian's letters. He dealt with them freely. Out of five he made one, and there is a curious, though not very important, instance in which he deliberately omitted a negative. His choice of letters and passages for publication, or his daughter's, as it may have been, showed considerable delicacy and tact. But still he patched as well as excised, and now, for the first time, we see

Gibbon as he was in private life. The Autobiography, delightful as it is, is austere and formal when set beside the Letters. Gibbon himself, in a doubtful compliment, has described Goldoni's Memoirs as more dramatic than his Plays. Benvenuto Cellini and Lord Herbert of Cherbury are so dramatic that they can hardly be called veracious. Gibbon's most formidable rivals as autobiographers, at all events in his own century, would have been Lord Shelburne and the Rev. Lawrence Sterne. I dare to add the name of Robert Lowe, whom it would be affectation to call Lord Sherbrooke. But their remains, alas, are fragments which provoke our interest only to mock our curiosity. Gibbon's Autobiography, therefore, holds its place, and the Letters show that though elaborate it is honest. Mr. Gibbon did not shrink in correspondence from expressing his real opinions because they failed to coincide with those of ordinary men. His reflections upon Venice are perhaps the strangest ever suggested by the Queen of the Sea. 'Of all the towns in Italy,' he writes to Mrs. Gibbon on the 22nd of April, 1765, 'I am the least satisfied with Venice. Objects which are only singular without being pleasing produce a momentary surprise which soon gives way to satiety and disgust. Old, and in general, ill-built houses, ruined pictures, and stinking ditches, dignified with the pompous denomination of canals, a fine bridge spoilt by two rows of houses upon it, and a large square decorated with the worst architecture I ever yet saw,' &c. Such was Venice to Mr. Gibbon, and perhaps to no other man since the foundation of the Republic. But if he was blind to the art and architecture of Venice, he could appreciate the society of Paris, and what he says on that subject has not lost its interest to-day. 'Indeed, Madam,' he wrote

to the same correspondent on the 12th of February, 1763, 'we may say what we please of the frivolity of the French, but I do assure you that in a fortnight passed at Paris I have heard more conversation worth remembering, and seen more men of letters among the people of fashion, than I had done in two or three winters in London.' Madame de Staël said that a serious Frenchman was the best thing in the world, and most Frenchmen have been serious. It might have been thought that of all Frenchmen Gibbon would have had most sympathy with Voltaire. But it was not so. On the contrary, he rather disliked him, thought him an overrated author, and laughed at his histrionic performances. 'He appeared to me now [the 6th of August, 1763] a very ranting, unnatural performer. Perhaps, indeed, as I was come from Paris, I rather judged him by an unfair comparison than by his independent value. Perhaps, too, I was too much struck with the ridiculous figure of Voltaire at seventy, acting a Tartar conqueror with a hollow, broken voice, and making love to a very ugly niece of about fifty.'

Mr. Gibbon was returned to the House of Commons as member for Liskeard at the General Election of 1774. He lost his seat at the dissolution of that Parliament in 1780. He had differed with his cousin, Mr. Eliot, on some points, and, as he put it, the electors of Liskeard were commonly of the same opinion as Mr. Eliot. Perhaps the nature of a pocket borough has never been more accurately defined. The new letters are seldom political. But there is a concise and not uninteresting reference to the debate on the Address in December, 1774, when Lord John Cavendish's Amendment, calling for further information on American affairs, was rejected by an enormous majority. 'Burke was a water-mill of

words and images; Barré, an actor equal to Garrick; Wedderbourne [*sic*] artful and able.' Mr. Gibbon differed from the rest of the world in considering himself honoured by the friendship of Mr. Wedderburne, afterwards Lord Loughborough and Lord Chancellor, at whose house in Hampstead he attended his last dinner-party. George the Third and Junius did not often agree. But Junius said that there was something about Mr. Wedderburne which even treachery could not trust, and the King called Lord Loughborough the biggest scoundrel in his dominions.

Gibbon's Letters may be said to derive more interest from him than he derives from them. They have not the audacious fun and commanding force of Byron's, the full-blooded eloquence of Burns's, the manly simplicity of Cowper's, the profound humour and pathos of Carlyle's. They are without the radiant geniality of Macaulay's. They do not touch the high literary watermark of Gray's. They express the mundane sentiments of an earthly sage, in love, if the phrase may be pardoned, with peace and wealth. The secret of the charm which most of them undoubtedly have is that they reveal on its inner homely side one of the richest and most massive intellects which the eighteenth century produced. Gibbon was an indefatigable student, and so far as he could rise to enthusiasm, an enthusiastic admirer of Cicero. Perhaps the rather monotonous flow of the Ciceronian rhythm is too evident in his prose. It is curious that another great writer, who belonged as much to the nineteenth century as Gibbon to the eighteenth, should have acknowledged his obligations to the same source. 'As to patterns for imitation,' said Cardinal Newman, 'the only master of style I have ever had (which is strange considering the differences of the

languages) is Cicero. I think I owe a great deal to him, and, as far as I know, to no one else.' But whereas Newman, who cultivated the vernacular, and liked to be familiar, must have meant by Cicero the *Epistolæ ad Familiares*, Gibbon, who wrote in full dress, and liked to be fine, was thinking of the *De Senectute* and the *De Amicitia*. Some of Gibbon's letters, especially those for the years 1768 and 1769, deal with that worst kind of trifling called business, and may be skipped with much advantage. Of the others there is scarcely one which will not repay perusal. They come indeed only from the surface of his mind. They reveal little or nothing of that deeply dug treasure-house in which all the learning of the time was illuminated by the search-light of a penetrating intellect, flashing over the records of the ages. Gibbon, like an illustrious poet, or thinker in verse, of our own day, lived two lives. No one who heard Mr. Browning talk in ordinary society would have guessed that he was the author of *Rabbi Ben Ezra*, or, indeed, that he had ever written a line. Gibbon's real intellectual intercourse was with the dead, his equals and his masters. With the living he was on his guard, and he never committed the mistake of talking seriously to people for whom he had no respect. He did not disdain to be the oracle of a circle. He shrank from Dr. Johnson. He patronised Burke. If Lord Rosebery will forgive the profanity of the remark, he was bored by the younger Pitt. The one man of his own calibre with whom he seems to have been thoroughly at home was Fox, and of Fox he saw very little, though enough to make him say in memorable words that 'perhaps no human being who ever lived was more entirely free from the taint of vanity, malignity, or falsehood.' But of Gibbon it may be affirmed that, as the dust of his

writings was gold, so the sweepings of his mind would have made the fortune of a letter-writer, an essayist, or a pamphleteer. He could not be dull. Lacking the highest form of humour, which is perhaps inseparable from reverence, he abounded in wit, in satire, in observation, and in insight. 'By this time,' he wrote to Lord Sheffield on the 14th of November, 1783, from Lausanne, 'those who would give me nothing else have nobly rewarded my merit with the Chiltern Hundreds. I retire without a sigh from the senate, and am only impatient to hear that you have received the sum which your modesty was content to take for my seat.' A malignant critic has observed that Macaulay, who would have sacrificed his 'little finger' to save the life of Mrs. Ellis, would have 'cut off his right arm' rather than be guilty of such a bad antithesis as Smollett's 'Ambassador without dignity, and Plenipotentiary without address.' Gibbon, on the other hand, withheld from the House of Commons the sigh which he had generously bestowed upon Susanne Curchod. If, as Mr. Leslie Stephen says, his references to politics are somewhat cynical, so were the politics to which he referred.

Gibbon certainly obeyed the maxim which, if we may believe Juvenal, descended (in the Greek language) from Heaven. He knew himself. It was a fashionable branch of knowledge in the eighteenth century, and Carlyle has not failed to denounce it with his accustomed vigour. But it was even then an accomplishment more often claimed than possessed, and there must have been few men in any age who ordered their own lives with the calm sagacity of Gibbon. 'I have always'—so he wrote to Mrs. Gibbon on the 27th of December, 1783—'I have always valued far above the external gifts of rank and fortune, two qualities for

which I stand indebted to the indulgence of Nature, a strong and constant passion for letters, and a propensity to view and to enjoy every object in the most favourable light.' Could the art of happiness be condensed into fewer words? Mr. Gibbon did really resemble the Epicurean philosophers whom he so much admired. There may have been some affectation in his manners. There was none in his opinions. He was, in every sense of the words, *totus teres atque rotundus*. He was never tired of intellectual work. When he had finished the *Decline and Fall*, the tenth part of which would have filled the life of almost any other man, he projected a series of historical biographies which death alone prevented him from accomplishing. Yet he died at fifty-six, and Macaulay, whose *History of England* is a small fraction of what he contemplated that it should be, lived to be fifty-nine. Macaulay, however, was a practical statesman. He was a Cabinet Minister, a Parliamentary orator, and the author of the Indian Penal Code. He sank the politician in the historian too late for the interests of posterity, though not for his own fame. In one respect he resembled Gibbon. He told Charles Greville that he neglected contemporary literature, and that his mind was in the past. There are few allusions in Gibbon's Correspondence to Johnson or to Goldsmith, to Richardson or to Sterne. Strange as it may seem to the learned men of this age, he was wholly ignorant of German. He preferred the French poets to the English, and among the English poets he reckoned Hayley. He sympathised with Voltaire's estimate of Shakespeare, whom he anticipated Leech's schoolboy and the admirers of Ibsen in considering an overrated individual. With the rhetorical school of poetry, the school of Dryden and Pope, he was familiar, and he did homage to the

genius of Milton. The most illustrious man of science that the nineteenth century produced confessed that absorption in his pursuits gradually diminished, and ultimately destroyed, his enjoyment of literary excellence. Gibbon, though not himself scientific, attended in pursuit of knowledge the lectures of John Hunter, being apparently interested in everyone's anatomy except his own. But, perhaps, like Mr. Darwin he was restricted in the range of his appreciation by the enormous scope and magnitude of his own particular studies. His love of classical literature, however, was unbounded, and it is not the least striking proof of his marvellous powers that he should have acquired for himself a mastery of the dead languages which the 'grand old fortifying classical curriculum' seldom imparts. Compared with the aids to learning provided for the modern student his facilities were slight indeed. Such an edition as Professor Jebb's *Sophocles*, or Professor Munro's *Lucretius*, or Professor Robinson Ellis's *Catullus* was as much beyond the imagination of the eighteenth century as a telegraph or a railway. A modern first-class man could hardly decipher the Greek type which was read by Gibbon. For Latin he had Forcellini. But as for Greek, the sight of a Liddell and Scott would have almost induced him to believe that the age of miracles had returned. Even Porson, one of the greatest masters of English who ever lived, wrote his commentaries in Latin. Bentley has been called the first of philologists, and to the results of his researches Gibbon had access. But Bentley unfortunately persuaded himself that the best thing to do with the classics was to rewrite them, and wasted in speculative emendation the time which might have been employed in illustrative comment. If any one will try to read Lucretius as edited before Lachmann

had revised the text, he will realise what it was to be a scholar in the days of Gibbon.

The fate of the historian's library is curious, if rather mournful. There are a few letters from Lord Sheffield to Gibbon included in these volumes, and among them is one dated the 14th of May, 1792, when Gibbon was still at Lausanne. In it Lord Sheffield protests against what he calls in his queer jargon the 'damned parson-minded inglorious idea of leaving books to be sold,' and suggests that the 'Gibbonian library' should find a permanent home at Sheffield Place. Gibbon replied with as near an approach to asperity as he ever used to Lord Sheffield :—

> I must animadvert on the whimsical peroration of your last Epistle concerning the future fate of my Library, about which you are so indignant. I am a friend to the circulation of property of every kind, and besides the pecuniary advantage of my poor heirs [the Portens] I consider a public sale as the most laudable method of disposing of it. From such sales my books were chiefly collected, and when I can no longer use them they will be again culled by various buyers according to the measure of their wants and means. If, indeed, a true liberal public library existed in London I might be tempted to enrich the catalogue and encourage the institution; but to bury my treasure in a *country* mansion under the key of a jealous master! I am not flattered by the Gibbonian collection, and shall own my presumptuous belief that six quarto volumes may be sufficient for the preservation of that name. If, however, your unknown successor should be a man of learning, if I should live to see the love of literature dawning in your grandson—— In the meanwhile I admire the firm confidence of our friendship that you can insist, and I can demur, on a legacy of fifteen hundred or two thousand pounds, without the smallest fear of offence.

Mr. Gibbon's remarks upon his friendship with Lord Sheffield are perfectly just. One more honourable to both parties never existed. But it is a pity that he did not comply with Lord Sheffield's request, or feel sufficient confidence in the future to make provisions under which the London Library would have ultimately acquired the books. For Mr. Prothero's supplementary narrative is melancholy reading. Gibbon's books did not fetch any-

thing like the sum which he expected from them. In 1796, two years after his death, Lord Sheffield sold them to Beckford for £950. Beckford gave them to Dr. Scholl of Lausanne, in whose hands they excited the admiration of Miss Berry. Afterwards the collection was broken up, and twenty years ago half of it was in the possession of a Swiss gentleman, who resided near Geneva. It might have been expected that Mr. Gibbon, who thoroughly appreciated his own services to letters, would have perceived the interest of the collection, apart from the merits of the volumes themselves. It is said that there still exists the pen, the single pen, with which Mr. Wordy wrote forty volumes to prove that Providence was always on the side of the Tories. I should not myself greatly care to see it. That is a matter of taste. But the books which were read by Gibbon, the materials of the greatest History in the English tongue, would have been a national possession for ever, and Mr. Pitt might have had them for £1000. But the lost opportunities of Mr. Pitt would form matter for a separate treatise.

I have already alluded to the series of British biographies which Mr. Gibbon contemplated writing at the close of his life. The delicate diplomacy which he displayed on the occasion forms one of the most amusing episodes in the whole of the correspondence. Lord Sheffield was of course the chosen instrument of the historian's designs, and in the month of January, 1793, he received his instructions from Lausanne.

> It is most important [wrote the great man] that I be solicited, and do not solicit. In your walk through Pall Mall you may call on the bookseller [Nichols] who appeared to me an intelligent man, and after some general questions about his edition of Shakespeare, you may open the British portraits as an idea of your own to which I am perfectly a stranger. If he kindles at the thought, and eagerly claims my alliance, you will begin to hesitate. 'I am afraid, Mr. Nichols, that we shall

hardly persuade my friend to engage in so great a work. Gibbon is old, and rich, and lazy. However, you may make the trial, and if you have a mind to write to Lausanne (as I do not know when he will be in England) I will send the application.'

If there is a finer bit of high comedy than this in the literary correspondence of mankind, I should be glad to know it. 'Gibbon is old, and rich, and lazy.' He was fifty-five, he earnestly desired the augumentation of his income, and his industry was without a parallel. Lord Sheffield performed his task, 'manœuvred your business,' he says, in writing to Gibbon on the 15th of March, 1793. But Mr. Nichols had invested £40,000 in Shakespeare, and was disposed to be cautious. 'He thought such a work would be more than you could undertake,' and so forth. Mr. Nichols's cold reception of the proposal is not very easy to understand. Gibbon was at the height of his fame. The concluding volumes of the *Decline and Fall* had been nearly five years before the public. The success of the book was as immediate as it has been permanent. The reputation of the author was European. The violent reaction against heterodox opinions of all sorts which the French Revolution produced had hardly yet begun. It might have been supposed that Gibbon's name would have sold anything. Perhaps Mr. Nichols did not know his own business. Perhaps he knew it too well. Lady Sheffield's death brought Gibbon to England in the following summer. But his own death in January, 1794, interrupted the negotiations so oddly begun. It would have been interesting to compare Gibbon's Biographies with those admirable Lives of Johnson, of Goldsmith, of Bunyan, of Atterbury, and of Pitt, which Macaulay contributed to the *Encyclopædia Britannica*.

The first notice of the *Decline an Fall* in these letters occurs on the 7th of June, 1775, within a few months from the publication of the first volume. It is

mentioned by Mr. Gibbon as an excuse for not visiting his stepmother at Bath:

> I am just at present [he says] engaged in a great historical work, no less than a *History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, with the first volume of which I may very possibly oppress the public next winter. It would require some pages to give a more particular idea of it; but I shall only say in general that the subject is curious, and never yet treated as it deserves, and that during some years it has been in my thoughts and even under my pen. Should the attempt fail, it must be by the fault of the execution.

1776 was a wonderful year. In it the American Colonists declared their independence, Adam Smith published his *Wealth of Nations*, the first volume of Gibbon's History appeared, and David Hume, who had lived to read it, passed away. The Declaration of Independence was the greatest political event between the Revolution of 1688 and the Revolution of 1789. The creation of political economy as a definite science transformed the commercial intercourse of the world. *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, though in form a narrative of past events, embodies the spirit of the age in which it was composed. It is a very great book. It is great in conception, great in execution, great in accuracy, great in learning, great in philosophic statesmanship and worldly wisdom, great in the ordered progress of its rolling periods, the sustained splendour of its majestic style. But it is marred, if I may humbly venture to say so, by one grave defect. Gibbon was fortunate in his clerical critics, such as Chelsum, Davies, and Travis:

> Who with less learning than makes felons 'scape,
> Less human genius than God gives the ape,

attacked upon his own ground a consummate master of controversial dexterity and historical erudition. He was justified in saying that a victory over such antagonists was a sufficient humiliation. They were not worth

breaking on the wheel. Archdeacon Travis indeed did not live in vain. For he was the unwilling recipient of those letters from Porson which associate the learning of Bentley with the wit of Junius, and with an eloquence beyond the reach of both. But neither the learning of Gibbon nor the incompetence of his assailants touches the real point. Of course no historian, not even an historian of Christianity, is bound to be a Christian. But an historian of Christianity, or indeed of any part of the Christian era, is bound, whether he accepts it or rejects it, to understand the teaching of Christ. Gibbon never understood it. He never tried. He knew no more about it, in the true sense of the term, than Tacitus or Plutarch. It was to him a subject of blank amazement, an opportunity for cheap jokes. He says himself in his Autobiography that with his return to Protestantism at the mature age of sixteen he suspended his religious inquiries. This is usually taken to be a sarcasm. I take it to be the literal truth. I agree with Mr. Bagehot in accepting as perfectly genuine the historian's surprise at the offence he gave to religious minds. He honestly thought that Christianity was an exploded superstition, which some persons were well enough paid to profess, and others were ill enough informed to believe, but which had practically ceased to have any influence upon human affairs. He therefore absolved himself from considering it on its merits, and among the 'secondary' or natural causes which he assigns for the victory of Christ's religion he entirely ignores the platitude, or the paradox, as the reader may please to think it, that no other teacher since the world began combined the same unfailing sympathy with human weakness and the same unerring knowledge of the human heart.

*February*, 1897.

'Let us leave it to the reviewers to abuse such effusions of fancy at their leisure, and over every new novel to talk in threadbare strains of the trash with which the press now groans. Let us not desert one another; we are an injured body. Although our productions have afforded more extensive and unaffected pleasure than those of any other literary corporations in the world, no species of composition has been so much decried. From pride, ignorance, or fashion, our foes are almost as many as our readers; and while the abilities of the nine-hundredth abridger of the History of England, or of the man who collects and publishes in a volume some dozen lines of Milton, Pope, and Prior, with a paper from the *Spectator*, and a chapter from Sterne, are eulogised by a thousand pens, there seems almost a general wish of decrying the capacity and undervaluing the labour of the novelist, and of slighting the performances which have only genius, wit, and taste to recommend them.'

So wrote Miss Austen, a woman of spirit as well as a woman of genius, at the commencement of the nineteenth century. Nobody could write so now. The eighty years which have elapsed since Jane Austen was laid to rest in Winchester Cathedral have brought no intellectual or moral revolution more complete than the apotheosis of the novel. Sir Walter Scott seriously, and with good reason, believed that if he had put his name to *Waverley* and *Guy Mannering* he would have injured his reputation as a poet, and even his character as a gentleman. If a novel be published anonymously nowadays, the object is that the public may be subsequently informed whose identity it is which has been artfully, and but for a moment, concealed. The novel threatens to supersede the pulpit, as the motor-car will supersede the omnibus. We have a new class of novelists who take themselves very seriously, as well they may. Their works are

seldom intended to raise a smile. They are designed less for amusement than for instruction, so that to read them in a spirit of levity would be worse than laughing in church, and almost as bad as making a joke in really respectable society. The responsibilities of intellect are now so widely felt that they weigh even where there is no ground for them. Imagination, if it exists, must be kept within bounds. Humour, or what passes for it, must be sparingly indulged. The foundations of belief, the future of the race, the freedom of the will, the unity of history, the limits of political economy, are among the subjects which haunt the mind without paralysing the pen of the latter-day novelist. The 'smooth tale, generally of love,' has been developed into a representation of the higher life, with episodes on ultimate things. I dare say that it is all quite right, and that to read for amusement is a blunder as well as a sin. If people want comedy, they can go to the play. If they want farce, they can turn to politics. The serious novel is for graver moods. But those who love, like Horace, the golden mean, may look back with fondness to the beginning of Her Majesty's reign, when novelists had ceased to be pariahs and had not become prigs.

Perhaps few of us realise the extent to which the novel itself is a growth of the present reign. If we put aside the great and conspicuous instances of Defoe, Richardson, and Fielding, of Fanny Burney, Jane Austen, and Walter Scott, there is scarcely an English novelist now read who died before Her Majesty's accession to the throne.

Superfine people, when they wish to disparage art or literature, or furniture, or individuals, describe the objects of their contempt as 'Early Victorian.' In other words, they consign them to the same

category as Dickens, Thackeray, and Charlotte Brontë. The immense and almost unparalleled popularity of Dickens has, as was inevitable, suffered some diminution. The social abuses which he satirised are for the most part extinct. The social habits which he chronicled have largely disappeared. The taste for 'wallowing naked in the pathetic' is not what it was. A generation has arisen which can be charitable without waiting for Christmas, and cheerful without drinking to excess. But these are small points, and it is impossible to imagine a time when Dickens will not be regarded as one of the great masters of English fiction. The late Master of Balliol, a keen and fastidious critic, a refined and delicate scholar, regarded Dickens as beyond comparison the first writer of his time. When the Queen came to the throne, *Pickwick* was appearing in monthly parts. The first number was issued in April, 1836, the last in November, 1837. It is a curious coincidence that in June, 1837, when the crown actually passed from William the Fourth to Victoria, the death of the author's sister-in-law suspended the publication. *Pickwick* had burst upon the world as an entire novelty. No other English novelist who was then writing survives now, except Disraeli and Bulwer, as different from Dickens, to say nothing of their inferiority, as chalk from cheese.

The imitators of Dickens, so numerous and so tiresome, are apt, illogically enough, to make people forget that he was among the most original of all writers. It is the language of compliment and not of detraction to call him the Cockney's Shakespeare. In Shakespeare he was steeped. His favourite novelist was Smollett. But his art was all his own. He was the Hogarth of literature, painting with a broad brush, never ashamed of caricature, but always an artist, and not a dauber.

There is little or no resemblance between Falstaff and Sam Weller. But they are the two comic figures which have most thoroughly seized upon the English mind. Touchstone and Mr. Micawber may be each a finer specimen of his creator's powers. They are not, however, quite so much to the taste of all readers. They require a little more fineness of palate. Sam Weller is, and seems likely to remain, the ideal Londoner. We cannot hear his pronunciation. We get his humour without its drawbacks. The defects are absent from his qualities. He has not even the appalling gluttony which distinguishes Mr. Pickwick and his friends. It seems strange to realise that *Pickwick* and *Oliver Twist* were actually coming out at the same time. *Oliver Twist* began to run in January, 1837, and continued till March, 1839. *Oliver Twist*, again, was overlapped by *Nicholas Nickleby*, which lasted from April, 1838, to October, 1839. Three such books in little more than three years is a feat which no other British novelist has achieved, except Sir Walter Scott. They proved to the benighted 'Early Victorians' that in the days of effete Whiggery and Bedchamber plots a genius of the highest order had appeared. Miss Martineau could never forgive Dickens for having in *Oliver Twist* confounded the new Poor-law with the old. That is not literary criticism. But it must beadmitted that Dickens, though not intellectually a Socialist, was a very sentimental politician. He hated political economy, and he coupled with it the name of Sir Robert Peel. A gushing and impulsive benevolence, which in Dickens's case was thoroughly genuine, is often offended by the cold-blooded temper and cautious methods of parliamentary statesmanship. When Dickens began to write, public affairs were on rather a low level, and were conducted on

rather a small scale. Dickens's early work was a more or less conscious revolt against fashionable lethargy and conventional shams. His novels, unlike Thackeray's, were in a sense a part of politics. They were meant to affect, and they did affect, the political temper of the nation. I sometimes wonder that the Independent Labour Party do not make more of Dickens. For Dickens, though he did not trouble himself much about abstract propositions, was possessed with the idea that both political parties were engaged in preying upon the public.

To Dickens as an historical novelist imperfect justice has been done. The *Tale of Two Cities* is said to be most admired by those who admire Dickens the least. A similar remark has been made of *Esmond*. The *Tale of Two Cities* is founded upon Carlyle's *French Revolution*. It has no humour, or next to none. But it is a marvellous piece of writing; the plot, though simple, is excellent, and, whatever may be thought about the genuineness of the pathos in *Dombey and Son*, or the *Old Curiosity Shop*, the tragedy of Sidney Carton is a tragedy indeed. The use of Christ's words, especially of words which occur in the Burial Service of the Church of England, is always a dangerous experiment. But at the end of the *Tale of Two Cities*, Dickens has justified it by the reverence and the dignity of his tone. *Barnaby Rudge*, the story of Lord George Gordon and his riots, is, I cannot help thinking, an underrated book. The execution of the executioner may be melodramatic. But nobody who has read the passage can ever forget it, and the rant of Sim Tappertit deserves immortality as much as the name of Dolly Varden. Of course Dicken's historical knowledge was neither wide nor deep. His most popular history is *David Copperfield*,

the history of himself, his own favourite among his own books, and a remarkable exception to the rule that an author is the worst judge of his own performances. I take it that the key to a proper understanding of Dickens and his work is to be found in the master-passion of the man. Dickens was a born actor. When he was not performing in private theatricals himself, he liked best to be at the play. The famous soliloquy of Jaques expressed his philosophy of life far more thoroughly than it expressed Shakespeare's. To Dickens all the world was a stage, and all the men and women merely players. When he wrote, he had in his mind not so much the way in which things would have happened as the way in which they would act. There is no 'realism' in Dickens, if realism means the worship of the literal. He drew, no doubt, as everybody must draw, from his own experience. He had the keenest eye for outward facts. Nothing on the surface eluded his observation or escaped his memory. He made ample use of his early opportunities as a reporter in the House of Commons and the courts of law. The famous debate in the Pickwickian Club, when Mr. Pickwick in his controversy with Mr. Blotton of Aldgate would not put up to be put down by clamour, was taken from a parliamentary duel between Canning and Peel. Bardell *v.* Pickwick is a travesty of Norton *v.* Norton and Lord Melbourne. I am afraid there is some truth in the tradition that Mr. Pecksniff was intended to express the sentiments of the illustrious Sir Robert. The family of the Tite Barnacles might be easily identified, if the process were worth the trouble. But Dickens's dramatic instinct was the strongest of his qualities, so strong that it overmastered all the others, except his humour, which

was, perhaps, a part of it. For his humour hardly any praise can be too high. It has every merit except the depth and subtlety which are found only in the greatest masters of all. About his pathos there always have been, and probably there will always be, two opinions. It differs in different books, and even in the same book. Little Nell and Sidney Carton scarcely seem to have a common origin. When the old washerwoman denied that one person could have written the whole of *Dombey and Son*, she perhaps only meant to express enthusiastic admiration. But people sometimes mean more than they know. If anyone will compare the death of Mrs. Dombey with the death of little Paul, he must be struck by the impressive beauty of the one scene and the harrowing extenuation of the other. It is hardly strange that there should be controversy when evidence can be produced on both sides. Dickens had a singularly simple and straightforward character. When he meant to be funny he was rollicking. He was irresistible even to Sydney Smith, who held out against the new humourist as long as he could. When he meant to be pathetic he piled up the agony with vigour. He kept the two things apart. There is no humourous element in his pathos, and no pathetic element in his humour. He could not have drawn a Mercutio if he had tried, and he knew better than to try. He has been reproached with not understanding the upper classes, or uppermost class, or whatever the proper term may be. The point is not very important, though a man of genius ought, perhaps, to know everything and everybody. Lord Frederick Verisopht and Sir Mulberry Hawk are not creations worthy of the master. I remember a discussion in which it was said broadly that Dickens could not draw a gentleman, and the negative instance of Sir

Leicester Dedlock was produced from *Bleak House*. The reply was, 'You forget Joe Gargery in *Great Expectations*,' and to my mind the answer is conclusive.

Dickens has been called the favourite novelist of the middle classes. If the statement be true, it is creditable to their good taste and freedom from prejudice. He certainly did not flatter them. He disliked Dissenters quite as much as Matthew Arnold, whereas Thackeray gave them the Clapham Sect, to which they are not entitled. But the popularity of Dickens in his lifetime was in fact universal. Everybody read his books, because nobody could help reading them. They required no education except a knowledge of the alphabet, and they amused scholars as much as crossing-sweepers. No man ever made a more thorough conquest of his generation. Indeed he was only too successful. Imitation may be the sincerest form of flattery. It is the most dangerous form of admiration. And if ever there was an *exemplar vitiis imitabile*, it was Dickens. His influence upon literature, apart from his contributions to it, has been disastrous. The school of Dickens, for which he cannot be held responsible, is happily at last dying out. Their dreary mechanical jokes, their hideous unmeaning caricatures, their descriptions that describe nothing, their spasms of false sentiment, their tears of gin and water, have ceased to excite even amusement, and provoke only unmitigated disgust. With their disappearance from the stage, and consignment to oblivion, the reputation of the great man they injured is relieved from a temporary strain. The position of Dickens himself is unassailed and unassailable. In this or that generation he may be less read or more. He must always remain an acknowledged master of fiction and a prince of English humourists.

The great glory of Thackeray is that the spread of education has continually widened the circle of his readers. Dickens wrote for everyone. Thackeray wrote for the lettered class. He cannot quite be said to have made the novel literary. Fielding, with his ripe scholarship and his magnificent sweep of diction, was beforehand with him. But he is essentially and beyond everything else a literary novelist. He was also a popular preacher. He preached many sermons on the same text, and that a text much older than the Christian religion. Not being in holy orders, he did not, like Sterne, incorporate one of his own professional discourses in a secular narrative, though indeed Bulwer Lytton was guilty of the interpolation without the excuse. The constant appearance of the novelist in person, the showman in charge of his puppets, is intolerable unless it be managed with consummate tact. Thackeray, of course, had tact in perfection. He was every inch an artist, and he justly felt that he was incapable of boring his readers. His alleged cynicism is only skin-deep. It is chiefly the mask of sentiment or the revolt against insincerity. Thackeray was a moralist to the backbone. He was no votary of art for art's sake, no disinterested chronicler of human folly or crime. He had, or thought he had, a mission to redeem the world from cant. Unless melancholy and indignation are cynicism, there never was a less cynical writer.

It was said of Charles the Second that he believed most people to be scoundrels, but that he thought none the worse of them for being so. Thackeray, like La Rochefoucauld, had a very high standard, and was shocked at the contrast of worldly practice with religious theory. The shipwrecked mariner on an unknown shore who, at the sight of a gallows, thanked God he

was in a Christian country, is a typical example of the satire running through all Thackeray's works. His crusade against snobbishness requires no justification, because it produced the *Book of Snobs*. Its moral utility may be doubted. To dwell upon snobbishness is to run the risk of promoting it, because it consists in a morbid consciousness of things which have only an imaginative existence. A famous Oxford divine is reported to have put into the minds of undergraduates ideas of wickedness which would never have occurred to them spontaneously. The more people think about social distinctions, the more they think of rank. There are vices which may be spread and encouraged even by satire. Until a man has grasped the truth that there are no classes, but only individuals, he will be all his lifetime subject to bondage. Thackeray sometimes seems to have understood the truth almost as little as his victims.

Thackeray died in 1862, at the age of fifty-one, nearly eight years before Dickens, who did not himself live to be sixty. With these two great men, superior to them in some respects if inferior in others, must be ranked Charlotte Brontë, a writer of commanding and absolutely original genius. Miss Brontë had a great admiration for Mr. Thackeray, and she dedicated the second edition of *Jane Eyre* to him. But she had written it before *Vanity Fair* appeared, and there is not a trace of his influence in any of her books. She and her sisters are unaccountable. They derived their power, as Burns derived his patent of nobility, straight from Almighty God. Anne Brontë would hardly now be remembered if it had not been for the others. But Charlotte and Emily were prodigies. Although their father's name seems to have been beautified from Prunty it marvel-

lously fitted the girls. They were indeed the daughters of thunder. Emily's poems, the best of which are among the finest in the language, do not fall within the limits of my task. Her novel, *Wuthering Heights*, with its grim force, its weird intensity, and its flashes of imaginative splendour, is like a solitary volcano rising from a dull flat plain. That love is strong as death we owe to the wisdom of Solomon. But the passion which alone redeems the inhuman ruffian Heathcliff is no more affected by death than by the weather, and the overmastering strength of his feeling for his dead wife is not to be matched in literature. In the history of the human mind there is nothing more wonderful than Emily Brontë, who died before she was thirty. Charlotte Brontë's trilogy of novels has been the subject of as many comparative estimates as the number three admits. Mr. Swinburne, and perhaps most critics, put *Villette* first. It is certain that all three belong to the very highest order of merit. Miss Brontë and her sisters, though well grounded in the beggarly elements, had few books, and saw little of the world. Charlotte Brontë's style, though sometimes scriptural, is emphatically her own. On small occasions it is apt to seem grandiloquent. On great occasions it is superb. People in her books always request permission. They never ask leave. Her style is, therefore, not a good one to copy. But in her hands it can do wonders. The intense earnestness and glowing ardour of her mind infused themselves into everything she wrote. She could not be trivial, flippant, or dull Yet she had little or no humour. Her satirical description of the curates is effective, not to say savage. But it is hardly amusing. In one of her published letters there is a most interesting criticism of Jane Austen. It is admirable so far as it goes. But then it does not go

so far as the humour, and without their humour what would Miss Austen's stories be? Miss Brontë brought the fervour of romance, the fire of her own heart, into the common lives of common folk. Common, but never commonplace. There was plenty of rough and strong character among her neighbours in the West Riding, such men as Mr. Yorke and Robert Moore in *Shirley*. Probably she exaggerated their peculiarities. No story she told can have lost in the telling, for she had the nature of a poet and an enthusiast. Nothing is uninteresting when she deals with it. *Jane Eyre* was too interesting for the decency and self-restraint of some critics, who denounced it as an immoral book. It is impossible to imagine a moral standard more lofty than the standard of *Jane Eyre*. This friendless governess, for whose fate and conduct there is no one in the world to care, leaves her home and the man she loves, faces starvation and almost starves, rather than break the seventh commandment. The success of the book and of the author was due to the public more than to the critics. George Henry Lewes, one of her most friendly reviewers, advised her to study the novels of Miss Austen, which, however admirable, were uncongenial to her, and from which she had nothing to learn. Her hero in real life, as ladies' albums used to say, was the Duke of Wellington, and she took the singular liberty of putting him into a shovel hat as Mr. Helstone in *Shirley*. The 'intense and glowing mind,' of which Wordsworth speaks, was Miss Brontë's by nature, and she wrote by inspiration rather than by effort. Sex has nothing to do with novel-writing, except that there are a few men who have never tried to write a novel. But Thackeray and Miss Brontë present a curious contrast. About Miss Brontë's men, even the immortal curates and the

irresistible Paul Emmanuel, there is always something a little unreal. Her women, on the other hand, are as true to nature, and as perfect in art, as were ever coined by the human imagination. Thackeray cannot have seriously thought that only women like Beatrix Esmond and Becky Sharp have brains. Miss Brontë cannot have really believed that all men were unconventional. But each of these great writers feels too much the power of sex. A witty lady once exclaimed, in reference to the various arguments that Shakespeare must have been a soldier, a lawyer, a statesman, a sportsman, and what not, 'Shakespeare must have been a woman.' Perhaps in the highest genius there are elements of both sexes, and the fable of Tiresias had a serious meaning. Emily Brontë understood men better than her sister. Yet Charlotte Brontë put into her books her whole mind and soul. They were not so much compositions as parts of herself. Her life was a tragedy. Her brother was a physical and moral wreck. She and her sisters struggled against the most insidious of all diseases, while the mind

> Fretted the pygmy body to decay,
> And o'er-informed the tenement of clay.

The Brontës had no models, and they have had no imitators. Nature broke the mould. They came from mystery, and to mystery they returned. They are not apparently the product of any specific age, nor is their style marked by the characteristics of any assignable period. They belonged, indeed, to Yorkshire, and were racy of the soil. The scene of *Shirley* is laid in the French War, and there are allusions to the Orders in Council. But the accidental setting had very little to do with the story. It is a story of love and hate, of passion and prejudice, of roughness and sentiment, of

gentleness and pride. Charlotte Brontë built firmly and deeply upon the great primary truths of existence.

In 1857, two years after Charlotte Brontë's death, appeared *Scenes of Clerical Life.* To compare the two women would be a futile task. Mr. Swinburne has contrasted them, very much to the disadvantage of George Eliot. George Eliot has now been dead nearly twenty years, and it may be not without interest to inquire how the interval has affected her reputation. Her fame has, I think, perceptibly, even considerably, declined. Her books are neither so much read nor so much quoted as they were twenty years ago. As regards some of her work this is not surprising. *Theophrastus Such*, with its amazingly foolish title, was, in spite of the beautiful chapter called 'Looking Back,' a failure, and is dead. Nor is there much life left in *Daniel Deronda.* Miss Gwendolen, with her 'dynamic glance,' and Daniel, with his hereditary impulses, are scientific toys. But that the *Sorrows of Amos Barton*, *Mr. Gilfil's Love Story*, *Adam Bede*, *Silas Marner*, and the *Mill on the Floss* should be obsolete is almost incredible. George Eliot does undoubtedly suffer from having been too much the child of her age. She lived in intellectual society; she was immersed in current controversies; she picked up the discoveries, and even the slang, of science; she introduced into her stories allusions which only professors could understand. One can hardly say with truth that, as a chain is no stronger than its weakest link, so a novel is not more durable than its most perishable part. But it is dangerous to put anything into works of fiction except human nature. The charm of George Eliot's early writing is its directness and simplicity. She was from the first a learned woman. She had translated Feuerbach's *Essence of Christianity* and Strauss's *Life of*

*Jesus* before she published anything of her own. But she had studied also the country neighbours of her youth in Warwickshire and the atmosphere in which they lived. The wit, the wisdom, and the tenderness of her early tales are hardly to be surpassed. In real life she seems, like many a comic actor, to have had little or no humour. But that the creator of Mrs. Poyser should have been devoid of it is a paradox too glaring to be admissible. Vicarious humour seems to be a possibility, however difficult to conceive. George Eliot may be said to have culminated in *Middlemarch*. After that there was perceptible decline. I cannot agree with those who find a falling off in *Middlemarch* itself. It is surely a great book. There are two plots, which is an artistic blemish. But the characters of Lydgate and Rosamond, of Mr. Causabon and Dorothea, of Caleb Garth (said to have been her father), of Featherstone the miser, and Mrs. Cadwallader the wit, of Mr. Brooke and Mr. Bulstrode, are skilfully sketched and admirably finished. *Middlemarch* is divided into books, and in one of the introductory chapters the author laments the leisurely days of the last century, when people had time to read the prefaces of Fielding. Time could hardly be better employed than in reading Fielding's prefaces, which as a matter of fact are not long. But they are pure literature, and George Eliot's are not. That gifted woman had great dramatic power, as well as a singular command of lucid and dignified English. But she was not content with these talents. She wanted to preach her gospel of humanity. With the merits of that gospel I am not here concerned, except to point out that they do not readily lend themselves to the purposes of fiction. George Eliot's broadly feminine sympathies, which inspired *Adam Bede*, are in *Middlemarch* mixed with less

manageable elements, and have in *Daniel Deronda* almost wholly disappeared. Her work is like Robert Browning's, in process of being sifted. That much of it, including *Middlemarch*, will survive one cannot doubt. *Romola* and *Felix Holt* may be too ponderous to come up again. Hetty Sorrel and Dinah Morris, Tom and Maggie Tulliver, Silas and little Effie are immortal.

The name of Charlotte Brontë will always be associated with the name of her biographer, Mrs. Gaskell. Mrs. Gaskell's first novel, *Mary Barton*, appeared in 1848. She had not quite finished *Wives and Daughters* when she died in 1865. If in creative power and imaginative range she hardly ranks with Dickens or Thackeray, with George Eliot or Charlotte Brontë, she is one of the most charming and exquisite writers of English fiction that have ever lived. In the grace of her style and the quaintness of her humour she reminds one of Charles Lamb. She treated with almost equal success two classes of subjects. In *Mary Barton*, already mentioned, in *North and South*, and in *Ruth*, she handled with rare insight and peculiar delicacy burning questions of political and social interest. The intellectual difficulties of the clergyman in *North and South* are an anticipation of later and more pretentious efforts. In *Cranford*, in *Sylvia's Lovers*, and in *Wives and Daughters* she depicted domestic and individual life with a beauty and a fascination all her own. Although *Mary Barton* appeared two years after the repeal of the Corn Laws, it embodies the facts and theories which led to the adoption of that great reform. It is, among other things, a most thrilling picture of life among the operatives of Manchester in the days of Protection, riots, and dear bread. It revealed Mrs. Gaskell to the world as a master of pathos and graphic art. *Ruth* is a passionate

presentment of the case for a woman who has been deceived and betrayed. But Mrs. Gaskell's admirers, including the whole educated portion of the English-speaking world, usually prefer her still life to her scenes of action. *Cranford* is in their eyes a pure and perfect gem. Perhaps no story ever written, not even *Persuasion*, is more exactly what it professes to be. It aims merely at describing the 'Early Victorian' society of a small country town. But this it does with so consummate and so beautiful a touch, that for the reader *Cranford* becomes the world. Just as there are some historians who make the struggles of nations look like tavern brawls, so there are novelists who dignify the humblest stage with the counterfeit presentment of human nature in its purest forms. The doors of *Cranford* open on the street. The windows open on the infinite. Who can be indifferent to the death of Captain Brown? The realities of life were ever in Mrs. Gaskell's mind. She was always humourous, and never frivolous; if, indeed, it is possible to be both. Most boys have been in love with Molly Gibson, and those who have not are to be pitied. Her father the doctor is, perhaps, Mrs. Gaskell's finest character. It is a portrait lovingly drawn. His originality, which is never eccentric, his sentiment, which is never mawkish, his irony, which is defensive and not aggressive, his depth and simplicity of nature, make him one of the most fascinating figures in fiction. The reader is almost inclined to share Molly's idolatry of 'Papa.' Mrs. Gaskell's popularity, never of quite the widest sort, has not waned. With the numerous novel-readers whose single desire is to kill time she does not rank high. For these she did not paint in sufficiently glaring colours. To appreciate Mrs. Gaskell one must have a real love of literature. To care about her at all

one must have some liking for it. But that is almost the only limit upon the circle of her readers. The art is never obtruded, though it is always there.

Miss Thackeray was too original to imitate either Mrs. Gaskell or her father. But the romantic charm of *Old Kensington* and the *Story of Elizabeth* shews that Mrs. Gaskell's spirit survives in other books besides her own.

Two remarkable novelists, who were also remarkable in other ways, great friends and great contemporaries, must be comprehended in any survey of Victorian novelists, although they had both published novels before the Queen came to the throne. I mean, of course, Edward Bulwer, Lord Lytton, and Benjamin Disraeli, Earl of Beaconsfield. The first Lord Lytton—Bulwer Lytton as he is commonly called—was already a notable personage in 1837. *Pelham* was nearly ten years old, and for sheer cleverness *Pelham* would be hard to beat. It was written before the author took to preaching and became a bore. Bulwer Lytton was one of the most intolerable preachers that ever lived. He was tedious, pompous, affected, and insincere. He was what Thackeray was not—a real cynic. The delicious impertinence of *Pelham*, the frankly free love of *Ernest Maltravers*, whatever else may be thought of them, are genuine. The rant of *Night and Morning*, of *Alice*, or of *What will he do with it?* is on the intellectual level of a field preacher without his genuineness of conviction. It is probable that Bulwer Lytton's novels have been assisted to a reputation they do not deserve by the excellence of his plays, which still keep the stage, by his fame as a parliamentary orator, by his versatility, which is always a popular thing, and by his social celebrity. *The Caxtons*, like the sermon in *My Novel*, is a bad imitation of *Tristram Shandy*. At the end of his life Bulwer Lytton reproduced

some of his youthful vigour in fiction. *The Parisians*, which came out after his death, is a good deal above his average, and *Kenelm Chillingly* is in his best style. Mr. Chillingly Mivers, the editor of *The Londoner*, may rank with Pelham the puppy himself. But as a novelist Bulwer Lytton belongs to the second class, and does not stand very high in that.

Among the more or less literary products of the Victorian age is the political novel, and the chief of political novelists is of course Mr. Disraeli. Mr. Disraeli's earliest efforts, such as the astonishingly clever and slightly ridiculous *Vivian Grey*, do not fall within the reign of the Queen. But *Coningsby*, *Sybil* [*sic*], and *Tancred* are Early Victorian. They are all political novels, and they are the work of a man who knew politics thoroughly from the inside. Partly, perhaps, by reason of his race, partly from the texture of his mind, Mr. Disraeli could always detach himself from the influence of the political opinions which he held, or professed to hold, and examine either an institution or an individual in the calmest spirit of scientific analysis. The principles of Young England, which made Wordsworth ask indignantly what had become of Old, are indeed to be found, Maypoles and all, in the book with the name which Mr. Disraeli could never spell. How far was he serious in propounding them? England is always young, and Mr. Disraeli neither discovered nor exhausted the affinity of Socialist doctrines to Toryism. His novels can hardly be said to have any definite purpose. They are none the worse for that. Their value, apart from *Henrietta Temple*—a smooth tale, chiefly of love—lies in their political criticism. In *Lothair*, which appeared after he had been Prime Minister, and which had, therefore, an enormous success, Mr. Disraeli

predicted, with a foresight unusual in a practical politician, the future prominence of secret societies in Russia and in Ireland. But *Coningsby*, which would be generally regarded by his admirers as his best book, is mainly critical, and only controversial in the second place, if at all. The political novel may be considered as a variety of the historical. Politics, as Mr. Freeman used to say, are the history of the present; history is the politics of the past. How far is either class of novel, or both, legitimate or desirable? I must confess to thinking that a novel should be a work of the imagination, and that it must stand or fall upon its own merits, without reference to any external standard whatsoever. A novel which only interests those who are interested in the subject of it does not, if this view be correct, belong to the highest class. Putting Henrietta Temple and her lover, whose emotion makes him foam at the mouth like a horse, again aside, I never heard of anyone who did not care for politics and yet admired the novels of Mr. Disraeli. I do not say that there are no such people. I do not say that, if there are any, they cannot justify their existence. Their existence, if they do exist, justifies itself. But they must be very few. They might say on their own behalf, that Mr. Disraeli's political musings contain truths or half-truths of what Kant called universal extent, and catholic obligation. For man, as an older philosopher than Kant says, is a political animal, just as some animals are very like public men.

Mr. Disraeli's epigrams are too well known for quotation. The purely political nature of his books may perhaps best be illustrated from *Endymion*, which contains, by the way, the most famous of them all. The 'transient embarrassed phantom of Lord Goderich' is a phrase which occurs in the opening pages of that

work. *Endymion*, though published at the close of Lord Beaconsfield's career, was written many years before it came out. It contains much curiously interesting reminiscence, and one absolutely perfect piece of caricature. Waldershare, a rising young politician of the livelier sort, is only an under-secretary. But 'his chief is in the Lords,' and that is the pride of his life. An under-secretary whose chief is in the Lords he considers to be at the summit of human greatness, and he has a picture-gallery hung with portraits of under-secretaries whose chiefs were in the Lords. This is perfectly intelligible, and most amusing, to the initiated. But for the general it needs interpretation, and, when it is interpreted, it does not amuse them in the least. In *Lothair* Mr. Disraeli introduced religion, and appealed to Protestant feelings, which he cannot be supposed to have shared. He thus secured a wider circle of readers, and it is the most popular of his books. Religion in a novel seems to be sure of the same permanent success as a comic incident in church. It is, or it seems, incongruous, and for many people that is enough. We come back to the question how far reality is admissible in fiction. Everyone must have observed that if a bit of real life is put straight into a novel, all the critics pounce upon it as the one absolutely incredible event. Instances of this are quoted to the confusion of the critics. But if, instead of saying that the thing could not have happened, which, except in the case of physical impossibility, is dangerous, they said that it ought not to have happened, they would usually be right. Truth is no excuse for fiction, and real life in a novel is apt to be out of scale. The story is not constructed on that basis, and the reader is expecting something else. There is a story of a

methodical man who every night opened a bottle of seltzer water for himself. Once, in the course of a long life, the cork fell back into the bottle. If such a portent were embodied in a novel, most readers would probably feel that an insult had been offered to their intelligence. A man of genius like Mr. Disraeli can do anything he pleases, because whatever he does will strike and perplex the world. But if he had confined himself to writing novels, I doubt whether they would have been read. Macaulay said of Lord Chesterfield that his reputation would stand higher if he had never written a line. That cannot be said of Lord Beaconsfield. But he tried a dangerous experiment, and one in which inferior artists would do well not to follow him. A man, said Swift, according to a doubtful authority, should write his own English. A man, or a woman, should write their own novels. If they have not fancy enough for the purpose, they should let it alone. Even Mr. Disraeli mixed a little mysticism with his politics when he treated his politics fictitiously. The Asian mystery, or the Semitic secret, was almost always in the background. Perhaps there is no Semitic secret. Perhaps there is no Asian mystery. But they have vitality enough to colour Mr. Disraeli's political novels, and to distinguish them from the prose of the House of Commons.

Among political novelists, happily a small band, Mr. Disraeli occupies a place by himself. Next to him, but next after a long interval, is Anthony Trollope. Trollope was, of course, a good deal more than a political novelist, and his political novels are not in my opinion his best. But they are extremely clever, they are full of good things, and the statesman whom he calls by the rather absurd name of Plantagenet Palliser is a master-

piece of generic portraiture. Trollope knew very little of political history. He was under the strange delusion that Peel supported the Reform Bill. He was an inaccurate observer of things political, even in his own day. In *Phineas Finn* he makes the debate on the address begin on the first day of a new Parliament, heedless of the fact that a Speaker has first to be elected, and that members have then to be sworn. But these are trivial blemishes. Trollope was never in Parliament himself, although he would have very much liked to be there. But he had a passion for politics, as for hunting, and he thoroughly grasped the more obvious types of public men. His attempt to depict the philosophical Liberal in Mr. Monk was a failure. But his conception of Disraeli was excellent, and that eminent performer's imaginary conversion to Disestablishment is an admirable bit of satire. Mr. Daubeny, as Trollope calls him, told his constituents that the time had come when the relations between the Crown and the Mitre ought to be reconsidered. His rustic audience thought that he was referring to the rival inns in the county town. But some clever fellows—the epithet is Mr. Trollope's, not mine—scribbling in London that night informed the public that Mr. Daubeny had made up his mind to disestablish the Church. Trollope made a mistake in grouping his political scenes round Phineas Finn, an uninteresting and even then hardly possible type of colourless Irish member. Both in *Phineas Finn* and in *Phineas Redux* the dulness of the plot is redeemed by amusing incidents and ingenious episodes. Trollope has not, perhaps, had justice done him as a caricaturist. Reference has already been made to Mr. Daubeny's Barsetshire speech. Less known, perhaps, though even funnier, is the case of the obscure member of Parliament

who has the misfortune to shorten his grandmother's life. His 'personal explanation,' with the frank acknowledgment that he had in a moment of frenzy raised his hand against the old lady, earns him a popularity he never enjoyed before. Of course Trollope does not put this grotesque idea into the form of a narrative. It professes to be caricature, and very good caricature it is. Mr. Justin McCarthy, with fifty times Trollope's knowledge of politics, is only a political novelist among other things. For although in *Waterdale Neighbours* he gave a capital description of a Tory Democrat long before anybody had heard of Lord Randolph Churchill, politics play in his novels a very small and subordinate part. The political life of an Australian colony is vividly sketched in Mrs. Campbell Praed's *Passion and Politics*, and in Mr. Anthony Hope's *Half a Hero*.

Trollope was in his lifetime more popular than any of his contemporaries. Twenty years ago it would hardly have been an exaggeration to say that half the novels on the railway bookstalls were his. Now his books are never seen there, and seldom seen anywhere else. Why was he popular? Why has he ceased to be so? It may be doubted whether his political stories had much to do either with his rise or with his fall. If his surviving admirers were asked to name his best book, there would probably be a majority for *Orley Farm*, which is a smooth tale, chiefly of forgery. If I myself were invited to pick out from all his books the best bit of writing, I should put my hand without hesitation upon the character of the ideal master of hounds in *Phineas Redux*. But there can be no doubt that the volumes which made him a public favourite were the famous Barsetshire series, beginning with *The Warden*, and ending with *The Last Chronicle of Barset*. These, as

it may be necessary to inform the younger generation, are all descriptive of country life, and especially of the country parsonage. With the exception of Mr. Slope, a canting hypocrite, and Mr. Crawley, whose character is rugged, lofty, and dignified, Trollope's clergy are worldly divines of the old school, Erastian in principle and lethargic in temperament. When he was congratulated upon the success of his Archdeacon Grantley, he said that he felt the compliment the more because he had never known an archdeacon. No man in after-life could have associated less with parsons than Mr. Trollope of the Post Office. But he was a Wykehamist, and as a Winchester 'man' must have seen a good deal of life in a cathedral close. It is to be feared that Trollope's books are dead. But it is a pity. He never wrote anything on a level with *L'Abbé Tigrane*, the best clerical story in the world. But *Barchester Towers* is one of the most readable of books, and I do not envy the man who preserves his gravity over Bertie Stanhope or Mrs. Proudie. Conversation in Trollope's books seldom reaches, and never maintains a high level. 'O Nature and Menander' exclaims an ancient enthusiast; 'which of you copied the other?' 'O Mr. Trollope and second-rate society,' asked a modern joker; 'which of you copied the other?' His popularity was due partly to his cleverness, liveliness, and high spirits, but partly also to his never overtaxing the brains of his readers, if, indeed, he can be said to have taxed them at all. The change in the position of his books produced, and produced so rapidly, by the death of the author may, I think, be thus explained. He stimulated the taste for which he catered. He created the demand which he supplied.

The novel with a purpose is a product of the

Victorian age. All novels should have the purpose of interesting and amusing the reader. In the best novels no other purpose is discernible, though other and higher effects may be, and often are, produced. Dickens may be said to have begun the practice of combining a missionary with a literary object when he ran a tilt at the Poor Law in *Oliver Twist*, and to have continued it when he attacked the Court of Chancery in *Bleak House*. But Dickens was too full of his fun to be a missionary all the time. While his fame and influence were at their height, in 1850, appeared the first of Charles Kingsley's novels, *Alton Locke*. Kingsley—Parson Lot as he used to call himself—was a Christian Socialist and a disciple of Carlyle, who was neither a Socialist nor, in the ordinary sense of the term, a Christian. In 1850, before he became tutor to the Prince of Wales, he was rather a Chartist than otherwise. He was a real poet, and it is probable that his ballads will outlast his novels. In *Yeast*, perhaps his most powerful book, which contains that striking poem, 'The Poacher's Widow,' he held up to hatred and contempt the game laws and the unhealthy cottages of the poor. Kingsley had this advantage over Dickens, that he did not wait until abuses were removed before he denounced them. His novels undoubtedly had a great practical influence in the promotion of sanitary improvement. But their earnestness, often judicious earnestness, was not conducive to literary perfection. Kingsley was a keen sportsman, and, unlike many keen sportsmen, had a passionate love for the country in which he hunted or fished. His descriptive passages are always impressive and often splendid. His dramatic power was very great, as *Hypatia* shows, and still more the death of the old gamekeeper in *Yeast*, which is worthy of Scott. Charles

Kingsley never wrote a story for the sake of writing a story, like his brother Henry, so undeservedly forgotten. The belief, which he never lost, that something tremendous was going to happen about the middle of next week kept him always on the stretch, and half spoiled him for a man of letters.

Another novelist with a purpose, or rather with purposes, was Charles Reade. His purposes were in every respect benevolent and praiseworthy. In *Never too late to mend* he exposed the cruelty which prevailed in prisons. *Hard Cash*, perhaps his most exciting story, was designed to effect the reform of lunatic asylums. He understood better than Kingsley how to combine a moral with a plot. He is melodramatic, and he never loses sight of the narrative in his endeavour to improve the occasion. If novels with a purpose are to be written at all, they could hardly be written more wisely than Charles Reade wrote them. Although he was for half a century, or thereabouts, a Fellow of Magdalen, his style was the reverse of academic. He carried sensationalism to the verge of vulgarity, and he was no purist. He was a scholar, however, and not at all a bad one. Indeed, his best book, *The Cloister and the Hearth*, shows not only a thorough acquaintance with the Colloquies of Erasmus, but a warm sympathy with the spirit of the Renaissance. In *Peg Woffington* he went for a subject to the stage of the eighteenth century, behind the scenes of which Dr. Johnson, for well known reasons, felt reluctant to go. But Charles Reade did not make an idol of propriety. Nevertheless he seems to have fallen into oblivion, along with two of his contemporaries who made a good deal of noise in their day, Whyte Melville and Wilkie Collins. Whyte Melville was the delight of many a boyhood. He seemed

to be showing one life. Digby Grand, the fascinating guardsman (if that be not tautology), and Kate Coventry, who was so terribly fast that once she 'almost swore,' made one feel what infinite possibilities lurked in a larger existence. Fancy knowing a girl who almost swore! And Digby Grand was a perfect gentleman, who always made his tailor and his bootmaker pay his debts of honour. Whyte Melville was great in the hunting-field, where he died, and nobody could describe a race better, except Sophocles and Sir Francis Doyle. But in one book he aimed higher. He produced an historical novel, a novel of classical antiquity. In my judgment, and in the judgment of better qualified critics, the *Gladiators* is a most successful book. I should put it far above the *Last Days of Pompeii*, and not far below *Hypatia*. Whyte Melville, like Esaias, was very bold. He touched a period covered by Tacitus, the greatest historical novelist of all the ages. But people do not go straight from the classics to the circulating library, and Whyte Melville could describe the character of Vitellius, which he did exceedingly well, without fear of invidious comparisons. It is a striking testimony to the permanent power of Latin literature that it should have absorbed a modern of the moderns like Whyte Melville. Wilkie Collins has been called an imitator of Gaboriau. He wrote of crimes and their perpetrators from the detective's point of view, and he fell at last into a rather tiresome trick of putting his characters into the witness-box. But he had neither the strength nor the weakness of Gaboriau. The first volume of *Monsieur Lecocq* was altogether beyond Wilkie Collins. He never wrote anything half so dull as the second. Gaboriau could not stop when he had exhausted the interest of his story. He had to go back and explain

how it all came to happen, which nobody wanted to know. In the *Woman in White* and the *Moonstone* the excitement is kept up to the end. But it never rises quite so high as in *L'Affaire Lerouge* or *Le Dossier Numéro Cent-treize*. Nevertheless there are precious moments for the reader of Wilkie Collins, such as Laura Glyde's sudden apparition behind her own tombstone, and the discovery of Godfrey Ablewhite in the public-house. Are these books and others like them literature? Wilkie Collins deliberately stripped his style of all embellishment. Even epithets are excluded, as they are from John Austin's *Lectures on Jurisprudence*. It is strange that a man of letters should try to make his books resemble police reports. But, if he does, he must take the consequences. He cannot serve God and Mammon.

I have now arrived at a part of my task which is peculiarly difficult, and which would, on the scale hitherto adopted, be impossible. I have finished, save for one brilliant exception, with those

Quorum Flaminia tegitur cinis atque Latina.

The number of living novelists is beyond my powers of calculation, and indeed the burden of proof rests with every wholly or partially educated woman to prove that she has not written a novel. The beneficent rule of Her Gracious Majesty has proved extraordinarily favourable to the fertility of the feminine genius. All women cannot be like Mrs. Humphry Ward. This kind cometh not forth but by prayer and fasting. They cannot all have the circulation of Miss Emma Jane Worboise. But others may do what Edna Lyall has done, and there are reputations which show that there is hope for all. 'It is too late,' says the Roman poet quoted above, 'to repent with one's helmet on.' But I think

I will begin with my own sex. Mr. George Meredith has long stood, as he deserves to stand, at the head of English fiction. An intelligent critic, perhaps a cricketing correspondent out of work in the winter, said that the *Amazing Marriage* was by no means devoid of interest, but that it was a pity Mr. Meredith could not write like other people. I presume that such critics have their uses, or they would not be created. If Mr. Meredith wrote like other people, he would be another person, with or without the same name, and perhaps almost as stupid as his censor. His style is not a classical one. But it suits Mr. Meredith, as Carlyle's and Browning's suited them, because it harmonises with his thought. Nobody says that Mr. Meredith's strong point is the simple and perspicuous narrative of events. He is not in the least like Wilkie Collins. He is not like anybody, except perhaps Peacock. But he is a great master of humour, of fancy, of sentiment, of imagination, of everything that makes life worth having. He plays upon human nature like an old fiddle. He knows the heart of a woman as well as he knows the mind of a man. His novels are romances, and not 'documents.' They are often fantastic, but never prosy. He does not see life exactly as the wayfaring man sees it. The 'realist' cannot understand that that is a qualification and not a disability. A novel is not a newspaper. 'Mr. Turner,' said the critical lady, 'I can never see anything in nature like your pictures.' 'Don't you wish you could, ma'am?' growled the great artist. Mr. Meredith has the insight of genius and of poetical genius. But he pays the reader the compliment of requiring his assistance. Some slight intellectual capacity and a willingness to use it are required for the appreciation of his books. They are

worth the trouble. There are few more delightful comedies in English literature than *Evan Harrington*. We must go back to Scott for a profounder tragedy than *Rhoda Fleming*. The *Egoist* is so good that everybody at once puts a real name to Sir Willoughby Patterne. The male reader is lucky if he can give one to Clara Middleton, that most fascinating of heroines since Di Vernon. Not that Mr. Meredith's women are in the least like Scott's. They are rather developments of the sketches, which one cannot call more than sketches, in *Headlong Hall* and *Crotchet Castle*, and *Nightmare Abbey* and *Maid Marian*. The *Ordeal of Richard Feverel* is the favourite with most of Mr. Meredith's disciples, and the character of the wise youth, Adrian, cannot be overpraised. But the same could hardly be said of the Pilgrim's Scrip, and Lucy is not equal to Clara. Besides, there is Mrs. Berry, who has not Mrs. Quickly's humour, and for whom all stomachs are not sufficiently strong. A word may be put in for Mr. Meredith's boys, who are natural and yet attractive. There is one of the jolliest of boys in the *Egoist*, and the school in *Harry Richmond* is quite excellent. It is a pity that Mr. Meredith did not always write his own story. He does not, save perhaps in the *Tragic Comedians*, gain by incursions into history. The anecdote which plays so large a part in *Diana of the Crossways* is not true, and requires all Mr. Meredith's genius to make it even credible. In *Lord Ormont and his Aminta*, and in the *Amazing Marriage*, Mr. Meredith has incorporated historic fact or legend. They are not among his best books. It is his imagination by which he will live. He had, like Mr. Disraeli, to educate a party. But politics are ephemeral, and literature is permanent.

Among the strangest vagaries of criticism which

I can remember was the ascription of *Far from the Madding Crowd* to George Eliot in a journal of high literary repute. *Far from the Madding Crowd* was not Mr. Thomas Hardy's first novel, nor yet his second. But it established his fame as an original writer of singular charm, with a grace and an atmosphere of his own. Anybody less like George Eliot it would be difficult to find. But at that time there prevailed an opinion that George Eliot was more than mortal, and that she might have written the Bible if she had not been forestalled. If that illustrious woman had a fault, she was a little too creative. With all one's enjoyment of them and their sayings, one cannot help sometimes feeling that there never was a Mrs. Poyser or a Mrs. Cadwallader, as there was a Mrs. Norris and a Miss Bates. Mr. Hardy's country folk are real, and yet not so real as his country. His peasants, who seem to talk like a book, are such stuff as books are made of. Their conversation is genuine. Nobody would have dared to invent it. But whether it be the pagan worship of nature, which is the strongest sentiment Mr. Hardy allows them, or the author's own passion for England in general and Dorsetshire in particular, the human element in Mr. Hardy's stories is 'overcrowded' by the intensity of the inanimate, or apparently inanimate, world. I am not, I hope, underrating the tragic power of *Tess* or *Jude*. The *Hand of Ethelberta* is a delightfully quaint piece of humour. But Mr. Hardy's typical book is the *Woodlanders*, where every tree is a character, and the people are a set-off to the summer. There is plenty of human nature in the *Woodlanders*, some of it no better than it ought to be. But it is the background. The foreground is the woods and the fields. Perhaps nobody is quite a man or quite a woman. The feminine element

in Mr. Hardy is his love of the country, which is neither the sportsman's love, nor the naturalist's, nor the poet's, but passion for the country as such, and that may be found in a hundred women before it will be found in one man. Mr. Hardy feels the cruelty of nature. He feels it so much that, as may be seen in *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*, he can hardly bear to contemplate the country in winter. But he loves it, and his inimitably beautiful form of adoration is the secret of his power. In his later works Mr. Hardy has done what only the French nation can do with impunity. Much of the abuse lavished upon *Jude the Obscure* was foolish and irrelevant enough. The pity of it is much more prominent than the coarseness. It is, like *Tess*, a powerful book, and no other living Englishman could have written it. But it is far below the level of the *Return of the Native* and the *Mayor of Casterbridge*.

Mr. Hardy's short stories, such as *Wessex Tales*, and *Noble Dames*, and *Life's Little Ironies*, are very clever, all the cleverer because they are quite unlike his long ones. Short stories came from America. Was it *Daisy Miller* that set the fashion, or the *Luck of Roaring Camp?* To claim either Mr. Bret Harte or Mr. Henry James as a British novelist would be an insult to the Stars and Stripes. They have shown, and so has Mr. Anthony Hope, that the English language is suitable to short stories, as indeed to every other form of human composition except pentameter verse. But the English people do not take to them. Louis Stevenson, that 'young Marcellus of our tongue,' tried his genius on them. But the *New Arabian Nights*, though I am not ashamed to confess that I would rather read them than the old, do not reveal the author of *Kidnapped* and the *Master of Ballantrae*. Stevenson is one of the very few really

exquisite and admirable writers who deliberately sat down to form a style. He was singularly frank about it. He has told the public what he read, and how he read it, and a very strange blend of authors it was. In nine hundred and ninety-nine cases out of a thousand the result would have been a disastrous failure. In Mr. Stevenson's case it was a brilliant success. Of course, every critic thinks that he would have found out the secret for himself. Certainly, Mr. Stevenson's books are the most studiously elaborate works of art. But the art is so good that, though it can hardly be said to conceal, it justifies and commends, itself. The reader feels as a personal compliment the immense pains which this humblest of geniuses has bestowed upon every chapter and every sentence of all the volumes he wrote without assistance. It is said that his warmest champions belong to his own sex. For while he does, like Falstaff, in some sort handle women, and while Miss Barbara Grant, or the girl in the *Dynamiter*, would have been the delight of any society it had pleased them to adorn, his writings teach that it is not the passion of love, but the spirit of adventure, which makes the world go round. The question whether the two influences can be altogether separated does not belong to a review of Victorian romance. There have been novels without women, even in French. Victor Hugo wrote one. Ferdinand Fabre has written another. But it is a dangerous experiment, or would be if it were likely to be repeated. *Weir of Hermiston*, in which the eternal element of sex was revived, is surely one of the greatest tragedies in the history of literature. It is far sadder than *Denis Duval* or *Edwin Drood*. Thackeray and Dickens had done their work. We know the full extent of their marvellous powers. But that cannot be said of Steven-

son. *Weir of Hermiston* is a fragment, and a fragment it must remain. But there is enough of it to show beyond the possibility of doubt that the complete work would have been the greatest achievement of that wonderful mind. The sleepless soul has perished in his pride.

Mr. Barrie, like Dickens, has had the unavoidable misfortune to found a school. But he is entitled to be judged on his merits, and not on the demerits of his imitators. No sketch, however imperfect, of the Victorian novel would pass muster without him. He has done what greater men have failed to do. He has added a new pleasure to literature. I am not among those—it is my fault—who fell in love with 'Babby the Egyptian.' Nor was I so deeply shocked as some of Mr. Barrie's admirers when the *Little Minister* reappeared in *Sentimental Tommy* as a little and trivial minister indeed. Babby and Gavin Dishart should, of course, have both been drowned, and Mr. Barrie incurred a serious responsibility in allowing them to be rescued by the editor of *Good Words*. It is not a case where hnmanity should be rewarded. Mr. Barrie is hardly at his best in the construction of a plot. Perhaps it is the vice of the age to abhor finality, as it is the vice of nature to abhor a vacuum. Most novels now begin well. A good beginning has become a bad sign. Few, very few, have, from the artistic point of view, a satisfactory end. Mr. Barrie is a child of old age, the old age of the nineteenth century. He has written as yet no great book, though *Sentimental Tommy* is very nearly one. His pathos and his humour, his sympathetic portraiture, and his exquisite style are best appreciated in single episodes, in short stories, and in personal digressions. The art of description Mr. Barrie has almost overdone. It was said of a disciple of Dickens that he

would describe the knocker off your door. If there were ever any knockers in Thrums, there cannot be many left now.

Mrs. Oliphant was a popular and successful novelist before Mr. Barrie was born. Few writers in any age have maintained so high a level over so large a surface. The *Chronicles of Carlingford* have for the modern novel-reader an almost mediæval sound. But the author of *Salem Chapel* and *Miss Marjoribanks* has supplied the public for half a century with stories which are always full of interest and often full of charm. Miss Broughton has produced a great deal of work since *Cometh up as a Flower* impressed the hall and the parsonage with a vague sense that it was dreadfully improper. The imputation of impropriety without the reality is an invaluable asset for an English novelist. It is not, of course, Miss Broughton's sole capital. The 'rough and cynical reader,' always rather given to crying over cheap sentimentalism, has shed many a tear over *Good-bye*, *Sweetheart*, and *Not Wisely but too Well*. The very names are lachrymatory. Then, Miss Broughton is witty as well as tragic. She first discovered the possibilities of humour which had so long been latent in family prayers. She is an adept in the comic misapplication of scriptural texts, as well as in other forms of giving vent to high spirits. The fertility and talent of Miss Braddon and Mr. Payn, who aim at giving amusement, and succeed in what they aim at, are obnoxious to no censure more intelligible than the taunt of being 'Early Victorian.' Sir Walter Besant and Mr. George Gissing are Victorian without being Early. For a novelist to be made Sir Walter is a hard trial. But Sir Walter Besant has not cultivated the Waverley

method, and his capital stories can afford to stand upon their own footing. Mr. Gissing's books are not altogether attractive. They are always rather cynical. They are often very gloomy. They do not enable the reader to feel at home in fashionable society. But their literary excellence is not far from the highest. They are complete in themselves. They are perfectly, sometimes forcibly, actual. There is an unvarnished truth about them which compels belief, and an original power which, once felt, cannot be resisted. A little more romance, a little more poetry, a little more humour, and Mr. Gissing would be a very great writer indeed.

> At nos immensum spatiis confecimus æquor,
> Et jam tempus equum fumantia solvere colla.

It is impossible to attempt an exhaustive catalogue of contemporary novelists. The time would fail one to tell of Dr. Conan Doyle and Mr. Stanley Weyman, Lucas Malet also, and Mr. Anstey and Mr. Zangwill. Their thousands of readers testify to their popularity, and their praise is in all the newspapers. Mrs. Clifford has shown in *Mrs. Keith's Crime* and *Aunt Anne* that a really imaginative writer needs no other material than the pathos of everyday life.

But a word of recognition must be given to Miss Yonge, who has treated the problems of life in a commendably serious spirit. Dr. Whewell, who was at one time supposed to know everything, used to say that the *Clever Woman of the Family* was the first of English novels. He did not live to read *Robert Elsmere*. One might be misunderstood if one suggested that Miss Charlotte Yonge was the spiritual mother of Mrs. Humphrey Ward. Yet daughters are often more learned and usually less orthodox than their parents. Miss Yonge wrote stories, and even religious stories, without an exhaustive study

of Biblical criticism as made in Germany. Mrs. Ward has indulged in something very like original research, and is certainly the most learned of female novelists since the death of George Eliot. Her novels are entitled to the highest respect for the evidence of industry which they always display. They are also an interesting 'end-of-the-century' example of the art of separating instruction from amusement. The frivolous people who want to laugh, or even to cry, over fiction must go elsewhere. Mrs. Ward requires attention while she develops her theories. Since the publication of *Robert Elsmere* no unbelieving clergyman has any excuse for remaining in the Church. *David Grieve* taught married people that neither husband nor wife has any right to talk in a style which the other cannot understand. In the Early Victorian novel there may have been too much sentiment. In the Late Victorian novel there is apt to be too much of everything. The 'smooth tale, generally of love,' has become a crowded epitome of universal information. In *Sir George Tressady* we see the House of Commons in Committee, and tea on the terrace, and dinner in an under-secretary's room, and public meetings, and declarations of the poll. We may even notice a vast improvement in the evening papers, which report speeches delivered at ten o'clock. If novels are to contain everything, the world will not contain the novels, and all other forms of literature will be superseded. The Plan of Campaign was the subject of a very clever novel by Miss Mabel Robinson, which actually bore that name. Mr. George Moore's *Esther Waters* has as much power as any book of M. Zola's, and more artistic merit. Miss Emily Lawless has kept Irish politics out of her sad and beautiful stories of Irish life. But Miss Lawless is an exception. She is no realist.

When Nicholas Nickleby was employed by Mr. Vincent Crummles to write a play, it was made a condition that he should introduce a real pump and two washing-tubs. 'That's the London plan,' said Mr. Crummles. 'They look up some dresses and properties, and have a piece written to fit 'em.' It is the London plan still. But it is now applied to novels, and not to plays.

1897.

# THE PHILOSOPHICAL RADICALS

Mr. Graham Wallas's *Life of Place*, closely following Mr. Robert Leader's *Life of Roebuck*, will revive the interest even of arm-chair politicians in the public life and public men of the first half of the century. Mr. Wallas has treated his subject in a thoroughly conscientious spirit. He has succeeded in drawing vividly and authoritatively a character of singular strength and singular roughness. Place's father was an unmitigated ruffian, who knocked his children down whenever he saw them. But Place himself managed to get the rudiments of education, and he made better use of those rudiments than most first-class men make of their degrees. He was apprenticed in boyhood to a maker of leather breeches. The trade was decaying, and Place, who married young, suffered miserable privation. His misfortunes, instead of breaking him down, braced and hardened him. He set up for himself as a general tailor, and acquired a lucrative business. He was a pupil of Bentham, the only man whom he regarded with unqualified respect, and throughout his life an ardent politician. His shop was in Charing Cross, and in his back room the Radicals of Westminster used to meet. He obtained great influence with his neighbours, and became a sort of Grand Elector for Westminster. He hated and distrusted the Whigs, from Fox and Sheridan to Melbourne and Russell. He was an extreme Radical and pronounced Free Thinker, who regarded Whigs and

Tories, Churchmen and Dissenters, with almost equal contempt. Robert Owen absurdly called him the leader of the Whig Party. In the *Greville Memoirs* there is one scornful allusion to 'Place and his rabble.' Greville erred on one side as much as Owen erred on the other. Place was an unseen power, but a power nevertheless. If he did not exactly make and unmake Ministries—his own friends were never in office—he nominated candidates, he composed the People's Charter, and he issued in 1832 the famous placard 'Stop the Duke, go for Gold.' Though almost illiterate, and a writer whom even a biographer cannot read, he was consulted as an oracle by men far more highly cultivated than himself and in far higher social positions than his own. His case is sidgular, so far as I know, in English politics. He never sat in Parliament, never fought a constituency, never edited a newspaper, never wrote a book, and never suffered persecution for his opinions. Yet he wielded an authority none the less important because it was indirect, and he was chiefly instrumental in removing their grossest iniquities from the Combination Laws. He was not, however, a Socialist, but an Individualist of the most determined sort, and he had no sentimental love of the working classes. What he had was a genuine hatred of oppression, a passionate love of justice and equality. His capacity for invective was unbounded; and his best friend, James Mill, objected to his 'raving.' He was a good hater and an implacable enemy; but honest, high-minded, and full of public spirit. Mr. Wallas deserves the gratitude of all historical students for his portrait of this extraordinary man.

Mr. Leader's *Life of Roebuck* is a good instance of the rage for biography which struggles with gambling for possession of the human mind. The late Mr. Roe-

buck, who died in 1879, was a strenuous and prominent politician of the second or third rate. He did little which anybody now remembers; he wrote nothing which anybody now reads. He was a rather clever, rather eloquent, rather noisy, rather sincere man, who made his own way in the world by dint of energy and self-reliance. A thin volume of some fifty pages would have adequately described his motives and his acts. Mr. Leader has given him nearly four hundred, with the result of dangerously diluting the essential spirit into a somewhat thin and vapid draught. I find no fault with Mr. Leader, who has done his work well. Probably he could not help himself. We are all the creatures of circumstances, and biography is the vice of the age. Moreover, there is an excuse for Mr. Leader which cannot be pleaded for all his rivals in the art. Mr. Roebuck lived too much for the day, and even for the hour, to be very interesting now. But he was connected in early life with a group of remarkable men, who, if their practical capacity had corresponded with their intellectual powers, might have broken political parties and altered the history of England. I mean, of course, the philosophical Radicals, the disciples of Jeremy Bentham and of James Mill, such as John Mill and George Grote and Sir William Molesworth, and Charles Buller and Joseph Hume (though he was no great philosopher), and Perronet Thompson and Mr. Wallas's hero, Francis Place, who prompted the party behind the scenes. With these men Mr. Roebuck was in his early days intimately associated. His own mind was anything rather than philosophical. His education was defective, his temper was imperious, his principles were versatile, and even his resentments were not lasting. But the course of his life brought him into

fellowship with the Mills, and, like many young men, he could not bear, when he was young, that anybody should be thought more Radical than himself. The austere doctrines of his original friends did not insure the consistency of his own public course. Consistency, if it means refusing to learn by experience, is an over-rated virtue. Those who never change their minds are, for the most part, those who have no minds to change. That Mr. Roebuck should have begun life a Radical and ended it a Tory, is no more a subject of reproach than if, like an infinitely greater man, he had begun as a Tory and ended as a Radical.

But 'est modus in rebus: sunt certi denique fines.' Mr. Roebuck changed his opinions with a rapidity which would have been more meritorious if they had been shirts. I take one subject, which will do as well as twenty. In March, 1852, he spoke in the House of Commons on the Militia Bill, and caused some sensation by bluntly calling it 'a necessary defence necessitated by the jealousy of the French people—jealousy of which a bad man might take advantage, and a bad man was in power.' The bad man was Prince Louis Napoleon, then President of the French Republic. Two years afterwards, in the spring of 1854, Mr. Roebuck made a speech in favour of war with Russia, which included a tribute to the 'loyalty and honesty of purpose' displayed by the same Louis Napoleon, then Emperor of the French. In 1858 he caused the sensation which he loved to cause by describing, in language of very doubtful taste, the recent meeting between the Emperor and the Queen. 'I have no faith,' he said, 'in a man who is perjured to his lips. I recollect when at Cherbourg seeing the Emperor of the French visit the Queen of England . . . but when I saw his perjured lips upon

her hallowed cheek, my blood rushed back to my heart to think of that holy and good creature being defiled by the lips of a perjured despot.' Now, if Louis Napoleon committed perjury at all, he committed it before and not after Mr. Roebuck praised him for his loyalty and honesty of purpose. In 1865 the Emperor had again become an object of Mr. Roebuck's admiration. 'While England and France hold together,' he then declared, 'the world must be at peace. The Emperor of France employs the power which he has, and so well exercises, for the benefit of mankind.' Most men change, but they do not change like that. Whatever may be the true view of Napoleon the Third's complex character, Mr. Roebuck's alternations of flattery and abuse have neither value nor meaning. They show that he had no settled notion of the man at all, but attacked him or praised him with absolute carelessness, to serve the immediate purpose of the moment.

Mr. Roebuck's judgments upon men and things are as nearly worthless as the opinions of any intelligent person can be. It is fortunate for the reputations of his contemporaries that they are so. For, like Vivien, who left neither Lancelot brave nor Galahad pure, he ran down with indiscriminate severity almost every character which presumed to raise itself higher than his own. He accused Prince Albert of a determination that the campaign against Russia in the Crimea should not succeed, than which it would be difficult to imagine a more infamous or a more preposterous charge. Of Mr. Gladstone he said in a sentence apparently intended to be humorous, 'He may be a very good chopper, but depend upon it he is not an English statesman.' Cobden, it seems, was 'a poor creature, with one idea—the making of county voters.' Lord John Russell was

'weak, narrow-minded, obstinate, and vindictive.' Lord Brougham, on the other hand, as students of his chequered career will be surprised to find, was 'a wise, a great, and a good man.'

But there was one person of whom Mr. Roebuck's high, not to say overweening, opinion never varied, and that was himself. When he was a parliamentary candidate at Glasgow in 1838, he contrasted himself with those vile wretches who crawl to the people for their own interest. In 1848 he used much the same language. At the close of his life he told the representative of a newspaper who came for an interview, that 'he had often thought that had he chosen to sacrifice his self-respect he might have become a leader of working men himself: they liked, as soldiers do, to be led by gentlemen.' One is irresistibly reminded of the advertiser's counsel, 'see that you get it.'

πολλοί τοι ναρθηκοφόροι, Βάκχοι δέ τε παῦροι.

If Newman was right when he defined a gentlemar as one who shrank from giving pain, Mr. Roebuck belonged to the majority of the Greek proverb—to the reed-bearers, and not to the Bacchanals. The truth seems to be that he was consumed by jealousy of Mr. Gladstone and most other eminent men. He was certainly a curious product of philosophical Radicalism. He never did anything by halves, and when he ceased to be an advanced Radical he became a vehement Tory. For a man who passed most of his life in talking, he had a singular prejudice against the 'agitator' who talked when he ought to have worked. The inconsistencies of politicians, however, are a trite and unprofitable theme. It is more interesting to examine the sources from which so strange a character as Mr. Roebuck's proceeded. He certainly could not be called, in

the ordinary sense of the term, a failure. He disliked privacy, and he was almost always before the public. He turned out Lord Aberdeen's government, the second government of All the Talents, by a very large majority, when he was too ill to speak for more than a few minutes at a time. After charging Prince Albert with a treasonable endeavour to prevent the success of the expedition to the Crimea, he lived to be made a Privy Councillor, and to be thanked by the Queen for supporting the Eastern policy of Lord Beaconsfield. He died in the odour of political sanctity as one of those noble patriots who leave their party for their country's good. Yet his career was singularly barren of positive or practical results, and it is difficult to extract from Mr. Leader's book, or from contemporary records, any one principle to which this ostentatious purist steadily adhered. Having entered the House of Commons a Benthamite, he left it a Disraelite, and the chain has yet to be forged which can connect the fantastic dreams of Mr. Disraeli with anything so prosaically solid as the greatest happiness of the greatest number. Bentham saw in his old age the complete triumph of a system which, when he originally propounded it, was treated with neglect and derision. His works, as one of his disciples finely said, were buried in the ruins of the superstitions they had destroyed. 'The writings of Bentham,' says Mr. Roebuck, 'produced a silent revolution in the *mode* of treating all political and moral subjects. The habits of thought were entirely new, and the whole body of political writers, without (for the most part) knowing whence the inspiration came, were full of a new spirit, and submitted all acts to a new test.' This is true, though not, perhaps, very impressively stated. But while the spirit of Benthamism pre-

vailed, the philosophical Radicals as a party in the House of Commons did little or nothing. There is in this volume an odd and unfinished letter which Mr. Roebuck wrote, but never sent, to Mr. Mill. It is the production of a candid friend in the worst sense of that term, and in the case of a man less conscious of his own moral rectitude might be called spiteful. 'The temper of the House of Commons is peculiar, and of that I quickly saw you were profoundly ignorant,' and so forth. This was written in the spring of 1868, and in the autumn of the same year Mr. Mill ceased to be member for Westminster. The loss to the House of Commons was greater than the loss to himself. It is not true that he failed. He was not a brilliant orator. The House did not fill when he rose, as it filled for the late Sir Robert Peel, who never had anything to say that was worth saying. But sensible men listened to him with a deep respect and a profound attention which Mr. Roebuck seldom commanded and never deserved. By the time, however, that Mr. Mill came into the House, the philosophical Radicals had as a party been dissolved.

Mr. Roebuck's own account of the Mills is not sympathetic, and should be taken with some reserve. John Mill was 'the mere exponent of other men's ideas,' 'utterly ignorant of what is called society,' did not understand the ways of women, and so forth. James Mill, if we may believe Mr. Roebuck, was an arrant snob. He 'looked down on us because we were poor and not greatly allied, for while in words he was a severe democrat, in fact and in conduct he bowed down to wealth and position. To the young men of wealth and position who came to see him he was gracious and instructive, while to us he was rude and curt, gave us

no advice, but seemed pleased to hurt and offend us.' The character of James Mill was not altogether an agreeable one. But this odious charge is new and requires corroboration. His opinions were anything rather than fashionable, and he was at no pains to conceal them. If he had been what Mr. Roebuck insinuates that he was, he would surely have taken some pains to push his son into society, instead of keeping him out of it. It is conceivable that the author of the *History of British India* may have formed a lower intellectual estimate of Mr. Roebuck than Mr. Roebuck formed of himself. It is hardly possible that he should have shared Mr. Roebuck's own naïve horror at seeing 'Place, Tailor,' over the door of a man admitted to share his august companionship.

Mr. Roebuck's account of John Mill's relations with Mrs. Taylor, afterwards Mrs. Mill, is, though unpleasant, shrewd enough. Mill in his *Autobiography* attributes his quarrel with Roebuck to a disagreement about the respective merits of Byron and Wordsworth. Roebuck traces it to his having remonstrated with Mill on his intimacy with Mrs. Taylor, and Roebuck's theory is beyond question the more plausible of the two. It is difficult to reconcile the letters to which reference has already been made with Mr. Roebuck's autobiographical statement that his affection for Mill 'continued unbroken to the day of his death.' Nor is there much affection in the remark that 'one so little conversant with women or the world would be a slave to the first woman who told him she liked him.' But of that remarkable attachment Mr. Roebuck probably gives the true explanation. 'Mill's intellect bowed down to the feet of Mrs. Taylor. He believed her an inspired philosopher in petticoats; and as she had the art of returning his own thoughts to him-

self, clothed in her own words, he thought them hers, and wondered at her powers of mind, and the accuracy of her conclusions.' The cynical maxim that all affection is a form of self-love has, like most cynicism, more sound than sense in it. Mill had a very warm heart and a very affectionate nature. His father, whom he worshipped, and of whom he stood in great awe, starved both. His mother died when he was very young. His brothers and sisters were no companions to him. The 'first woman who told him she liked him' gave him the sympathy he required and had not. He had idealised women. He idolised a woman. Mr. Roebuck idealised nobody, and only idolised himself.

Although Mr. Roebuck's great political achievement was the destruction of Lord Aberdeen's Ministry and the appointment of the Crimean Committee, his career is mainly, if not solely, interesting now from his connection with the philosophical Radicals of the thirties and forties. They were such remarkably clever men, and they did so remarkably little, that they have both positive and negative claims to attention. When Macaulay came back from India in 1838, he found the Radical party reduced to 'Grote and his wife.' To a pure Whig that was not an unpleasant discovery. But it was, and it remains, a curious phænomenon. Grote, and Mill, and Molesworth, and Buller were men of high character and brilliant ability. Hume and Roebuck were industrious and successful Members of Parliament. From the resignation of Lord Grey in 1834 to the resignation of Lord Melbourne in 1841 the Whig government was singularly weak. But the feeble organism held its own against attack, and when it finally succumbed, it fell before the Conservative revival which had been elaborately fostered by Sir Robert Peel. Full justice has

scarcely yet been done to the qualities of that illustrious man, whose biography, unlike Roebuck's and Place's, remains to be written. He was the father of modern Conservatism and of modern Liberalism. He was too great for one party. He carried on the financial policy of Mr. Pitt and handed it down to Mr. Gladstone. He taught Conservatives to rely upon the House of Commons and not upon the House of Lords. Twice in his life he yielded to intellectual conviction and confessed that he had been wrong. He accepted the Report of the Bullion Committee in favour of resuming cash payments. He was converted to free trade not by the Irish famine, but by the arguments of Mr. Cobden. In 1829 there was no Francis Horner, and Richard Cobden was still obscure. On that occasion Peel yielded to necessity, and took the Duke with him. Of Catholic emancipation he said frankly, 'The credit of this measure is not due to me. It is due to Mr. Fox, to Mr. Sheridan, to Mr. Grattan, and to an illustrious and right honourable friend of mine, now no more.' He meant, I need hardly say, George Canning. Peel is not to be judged by his conduct in 1829, for what he did then was what almost any man in his senses would have done under the same conditions. In 1812, and still more in 1846, he showed the insight of a real statesman. 1846 was of course the turning-point of his career. Only a really great man, who could see at a momentous crisis the true proportions of things, would have deliberately broken in pieces the structure he had himself so patiently and laboriously reared. Sir Robert Peel did not hesitate when he had to choose between the interests of his party and the welfare of the people. The Whigs could not form a Government, and he had to carry Free Trade himself, if it was to be carried at

all. He was compared with Judas Iscariot, but he saved the nation.

Sir Robert Peel was intellectually equal to the most abstrusely philosophical of his contemporaries. He was an excellent scholar, a supremely capable man of business, a brilliant debater, a man of highly cultivated taste and judgment. But first and foremost, and above all things, he was a practical statesman. Mr. Disraeli, in his wonderfully characteristic *Life of Lord George Bentinck*, calls him 'the greatest member of Parliament who ever lived,' and says that he 'played on the House of Commons like an old fiddle.' He could thoroughly understand and appreciate an abstract treatise like Ricardo's *Political Economy*. But he had studied the book of the world as well as the world of books. He knew what could be done, and when the time had come for doing it. The philosophical Radicals did not know. Some of them did not seem to care. They were justly convinced of their own integrity, and fully imbued with a belief in their own principles. So long as they neither said nor did anything inconsistent with the doctrines they professed, they were satisfied to hug themselves in haughty and splendid isolation. Their mentor or instigator outside Parliament was Francis Place, facetiously called by them 'Father Place,' who, as already said, shocked Mr. Roebuck's youthful susceptibilities by being a tailor. He was plain-spoken even to bluntness, and beyond it. He seems to have been the author of that pleasant phrase 'the shortening of Charles the First,' which I have seen described as a modern Americanism. He did not cultivate the literary graces, and his letters are neither polished nor polite. He was a straightforward Radical, bent on going the hog, the whole hog, and nothing but the hog. On the 3rd of

October, 1836, he wrote to Mr. Roebuck, 'Men who think the resignation of the Whigs a reason for deserting the people are of no use to the people; fit only to keep a truckling set of Tories, under the name of Whigs, in office, and thus to drivel down, as low as it can be drivelled down, the whole nation into a state of contemptible imbecility.' These are brave words, and they are a fair sample of what Mr. Place wrote to his friends in the House of Commons. He accused them of subserviency to Lord John Russell, and when one of them attacked the Whig Government he was in an ecstasy of delight. It does not seem to have struck him that nothing came of these bold performances, that they did the Whigs no particular harm, and that beyond affording personal gratification to Mr. Place they might as well not have occurred. Mr. Place and his associates, to adopt a French phrase, payed themselves with words. The Whigs left them to their amusement, and plodded on. A Liberal Member of Parliament wrote to Mr. Gladstone in 1886 begging him to withdraw the Home Rule Bill, but adding that if it were not withdrawn, he should vote for it. He is said to have been surprised that his appeal was unsuccessful.

Mr. Mill, in his *Autobiography*, which some one described rather well as the history not of a man but of a mind, pays a warm tribute to his old friend Roebuck for services rendered to national education and to the self-government of the colonies. But both of these were Whig measures, and if the substitution of national for individual effort in elementary teaching be due to anyone before Mr. Forster, it is due to Lord Brougham. What Mr. Mill says of the philosophical Radicals in general is more accurate than what he says of Mr. Roebuck in particular. 'When measures were pro-

posed flagrantly at variance with their principles, such as the Irish Coercion Bill, or the Canada Coercion in 1837, they came forward manfully, and braved any amount of hostility and prejudice, rather than desert the right, but on the whole they did little to promote any opinions; they had little enterprise, little activity; they left the lead of the Radical portion of the House to the old hands, to Hume and O'Connell.' Mr. Mill thought the result inevitable. 'And now,' he adds, 'on calm retrospection, I can perceive that the men were less in fault than we supposed, that we expected too much from them. They were in unfavourable circumstances. Their lot was cast in the ten years of inevitable reaction. . . . It would have required a great political leader, which no one is to be blamed for not being, to have effected really great things by parliamentary discussion when the nation was in this mood.' The moods of nations are affected by the activity of individuals. A philosopher may say that politics are a game not worth playing, that the mass of mankind do not understand what is good for them, but are at the mercy of office-seekers and charlatans. Probably that was not far from being Mr. Mill's own opinion. But it is not a doctrine which a Member of Parliament can without absurdity profess. When 'Father Place' abused his disciples for speaking too mildly or too seldom, he scarcely ever gave them any practical hints. So long as they denounced the 'base, bloody, and brutal' Whigs, he was contented, and even delighted. There was, of course, the Charter, which Mr. Place, in a letter to Sir Erskine Perry, claims to have drawn, with the assistance of Mr. Lovett, and which Mr. Wallas proves that he actually drew. The Charter received the approval of the Working Men's Associations, it was

supported by the *Northern Star* and the *Western Vindicator*, the Chartists became a political party. Mrs. Grote assured Mr. Place that 'she would never consent to wag a hand or foot to awaken the great public up from its lethargy till those Whigs were sent a-packing.' Those Whigs were sent a-packing within three years from the date of Mrs. Grote's letter. But it was the Tories, not the Chartists, who sent them. The two great political organisations went on never minding. They behaved as if no such thing as Chartism had ever existed in the world. In 1842, after Mrs. Grote had had her wish, and the Whigs had been turned out, the House refused by an overwhelming majority to hear the Chartists by counsel. Mr. Roebuck spoke in favour of the motion. But as he took the opportunity of calling Feargus O'Connor a 'cowardly and malignant demagogue,' his advocacy was not of much avail. Mr. Roebuck's taste and capacity for invective were no doubt exceptional. But his unpractical and unbusiness-like methods he shared with his political allies. It is not that they were theorists. Theorists have changed the face of the world. Everybody knows Carlyle's outburst of rhetoric against some depreciation of 'mere theory.' 'There was once a man called Jean Jaques Rousseau. He wrote a book called *The Social Contract*. It was a theory, and nothing but a theory. The French nobles laughed at the theory, and their skins went to bind the second edition of the book.' The allusion is of course to the famous Tanneries of Meudon, to a dry historic fact. Rousseau was perfectly consistent, because he was a speculative philosopher. He was not, and did not pretend to be, a practical politician. The philosophical Radicals did. But they fell between two stools. They would rightly struggle, and yet would wrongly

win. Too virtuous to intrigue, they were not virtuous enough to be satisfied with the approval of their own consciences. The odd, and by no means attractive, letters from Mr. Place printed by Mr. Leader are a continuous series of grumbles and growls. 'The Reformers in the House of Commons are not less deserving of censure than the Whig Ministers whom they have served.' 'I should be satisfied if I saw but six men who would despise the opinion of the House when circumstances made it necessary, and stood up for principle, *i.e.*, for the people.' 'It would be a guinea ill bestowed in hearing fulsome praises of the Administration, and resolutions ambiguously worded in the true Whig style, to secure the assent of those who may be committed by being present in supporting ministers in keeping down, as far as they can, the energies of the people, in causing them to have no confidence in public men.' These are fair samples of Mr. Place's epistolary style, though it is varied by occasional hymns of praise over some attack upon the Whig Government, for which the Whig Government did not care two straws.

In one of John Bright's greatest speeches, the speech he delivered at Bradford in 1877, when the statue of Cobden was unveiled, he said, with as much truth as eloquence, that the famous League had made it impossible for any one to be starved to death through a famine made by law. The Leaguers knew their business, and did it. The philosophical Radicals, though they knew very well what they wanted to do, had no notion of how to do it. The principal item in the Charter which has been adopted, I mean the ballot, was carried by Mr. Gladstone, who never had anything to do with them, and at the time of the Monster Petition was a Tory. 'A great Minister was

converted,' as Mr. Bright said, converted by argument and reason to free trade. More lately Irishmen have shown what power can be wielded in the British Parliament by discipline and perseverance. Home Rule is a dangerous topic, and the controversy is not yet concluded. But does anybody believe that if there had been no Irish Land League in 1879, there would have been any Irish Land Act in 1881? A letter from Mr. Roebuck to Dr. Black, written in 1848, is a good commentary upon the measure of success achieved by himself and his friends:—

> I have received [he wrote] a printed paper signed by Lovett and others about their plans. If I can do anything to assist, I shall be glad, and really believe the present not merely a good opportunity for stirring, but one which imposes on the true friends of good government the duty of making some attempt to rescue the working classes from the danger to which they are now exposed. The late doings of the Chartists have been seized by the Whigs with delight, as they have afforded them a pretext for expense, and given them a means of retaining office. They will now effect a junction with a large section of the Tories, and we shall have a dead-set made at the persons who endeavour to change the representation in this country.

Mr. Roebuck here sums up the result, in a practical sense, of philosophical Radicalism. It led to Chartism, and Chartism perished in ridicule. There is of course another side to the question. The influence wrought by men's lives and conduct is not confined to the actions which they perform. The greatest British statesman of the eighteenth century, judged by the power which he has exercised and still exercises upon human thought, was Edmund Burke. Yet Burke never passed a statute, and seldom changed a vote in the House of Commons. The speech on Conciliation with America, perhaps the greatest ever delivered in English, did not even draw a full house. But then Burke, as Southey proudly said of himself, was 'conscious that he laboured for posterity.' So no doubt was Mill. The few years which Mr. Mill

spent in Parliament were not the happiest nor the most useful of his honourable and beneficent life. His treatise on Liberty does not rank with the *Thoughts on the Causes of the Present Discontents*, which reverses the case of the bad French poet's *Ode to Posterity* by combining an ephemeral title with an imperishable substance. But Mill *On Liberty* is worth all the speeches that were made in the first reformed Parliament of Great Britain and Ireland. Mr. Grote has a permanent place in the history of learning and literature which is not affected by his political success or failure. But the party which derived its inspiration from the Radical tailor of Charing Cross aimed at immediate objects, and were far from despising the politics of the day. It is therefore fair to contrast their brilliant abilities with their meagre achievements. The year 1836 furnishes a typical instance of their procedure. Before Parliament opened Mr. Roebuck wrote and published two pamphlets, which he called respectively *Radical Support to a Whig Minister* and *The Radicals and the Ministers*. Their object was to withdraw Radical votes from the Government of Lord Melbourne. But, as Mr. Roebuck's candid biographer says, 'nothing practical came of the scheme. Radicals like Sir William Molesworth joined with Roebuck in insisting on a more determined and straightforward action on the part of the Ministers as the only way to obtain hearty Radical support. Yet the session ran its course, with the usual accompaniments of bitter words, but no deeds.' The session ran its course, and the philosophical Radicals ran theirs. The chief result in both instances was the lapse of time. Sir William Molesworth, whose 'wealth and rank,' dazzled Mr. Roebuck almost as much as Mr. Place's occupation disgusted him, pursued his own career. He edited the works of Hobbes, and died a

Secretary of State under Lord Palmerston in his forty-sixth year. But long before that time the philosophical Radicals had been broken up, and Mr. Roebuck was referring contemptuously to 'Molesworth and Co.'

Mr. Roebuck's services to Canada are well known, and they were neither the less creditable nor the worse rendered because he was paid for them. 'Sir John Hanmer, in 1836,' says Mr. Leader, 'asked the House of Commons to affirm that it was contrary to its independence, a breach of its privileges, and derogatory to its character, for any of its members to become the paid advocate of any portion of his Majesty's subjects.' It is, perhaps, rather surprising that sixty years ago the House of Commons should have rejected such a motion by a majority of nearly three to one. The Canadian problem was solved by a judicious mixture of firmness and liberality. The philosophical Radicals urged upon the Whig Government the claims of Canada to what would now be called Home Rule. But they were forcing an open door. Lord Durham, who had been the most Radical Member of Lord Grey's Cabinet, receives the praise of Miss Martineau for the achievement. A cool and sagacious Liberal of the last generation used to observe that Lord Durham claimed credit for issuing a report which was written by Charles Buller, and for suppressing a rebellion which was put down by Francis Head. Nobody had much to say for the Colonial Office, and poor Lord Glenelg was lashed with merciless severity by Lord Brougham. 'These events, my lords, must have given my noble friend many a sleepless day.' Lord Brougham had his laugh, and Lord Glenelg had his nap. But after all the dull unimaginative Whigs did put down a most formidable rising, and did give contentment to the French Canadians. They were too apt

to think that they alone could govern the country. But they could govern it. They were born with official minds, and played with red tape in the nursery. Nothing but the French Revolution could have kept them out of Downing Street for five-and-thirty years. If Lord Melbourne had been a real Whig and not a half-converted Tory, or if Sir Robert Peel had not been head and shoulders above all his contemporaries, they might have remained there for an indefinite period. The swing of the pendulum was not invented till 1868, the year of the first election under household suffrage. Then Mr. Gladstone became a Radical, and Radicalism became a tremendous force in English politics. Time has vindicated most of the principles which the Benthamite or Utilitarian Radicals held. But they have been carried out by different methods and by other hands. Mr. Roebuck, who survived almost all his early associates, lived to support not merely the foreign policy of Lord Palmerston in 1850, but even the foreign policy of Lord Beaconsfield in 1878. He was too flighty and eccentric a personage to be a fair specimen of any party or any school. The moral of his career, if there be any, is hardly worth drawing. The moral of philosophical Radicalism appears to be that politics may be either practical or philosophical, but that they cannot be both. Bentham revolutionised English jurisprudence from his study. Peel revolutionised English finance in the House of Commons. The Radicals who were patronised and admonished by 'Father Place,' produced no consequences, and have left no mark. They have been succeeded by what Mr. Chamberlain would call a more judicious 'blend.' Since their day there have been two distinguished examples of philosopy in Radical politics. Mr. Mill and Mr. Morley have both com-

bined the theory with the practice of government. For Mr. Mill, though he never sat in the Cabinet, was during many years engaged in the administration of British India. Mr. Morley's conspicuous success in Ireland is a proof that the failure of the philosophical Radicals was not due to their speculative tastes, but to their political deficiences.

*April*, 1898.

# THE ART OF LETTER-WRITING

Mr. John Murray's new and authoritative edition of Byron, prepared with his usual skill and thoroughness by Mr. Rowland Prothero, has reached the first instalment of the 'noble poet's' letters. The merit of Byron's verse is still the subject of keen and vivacious controversy. Some critics consider him second only to Shakespeare. Others put him where sensible travellers put themselves, in the third class, because there is no fourth. I have no ambition as I certainly have no power, *tantas componere lites*. About Byron's letters there is no dispute. By universal consent they are among the best, if not the very best, in the English language. Their natural eloquence, their audacious humour, the force and spirit of their substance, the grace and purity of their style, make them the most readable letters in the world. This new volume contains, with one exception, only the letters of Byron's early youth before he had become famous, and when his manner was imperfectly formed. The exception is the admirable sketch of his old college friend, Charles Skinner Matthews, who died before him, uncle of Lord Llandaff. But even his hurried scrawls from Harrow are characteristic, and his dashing epistles from Cambridge are worth tons of morbid self-analysis. Here and there are touches of the reckless fun in which he afterwards revelled, as when he confesses that his handwriting is as bad as his character. That can hardly have been so, as it was not absolutely illegible. But if

a bad man writes good letters one need not complain. There are so many good men who write bad letters that we may even be grateful when once in a way the antithesis, true or false, is reversed. For my part, I think we have had more than enough both in the shape of unctuous moralising, and in the way of sophistical apology about the private vices of celebrated authors. Drunkenness is not less disgusting because Burns got drunk, and Shelley's lyrics are no excuse for conjugal infidelity. But fortunately we are not made judges one of another. Great men, like small men, are responsible to a tribunal which is not human and cannot err. If Byron boasted of his irregularities, and perhaps exaggerated them, that has nothing to do with the value of his work. The dullest drivellers have done the same. The really interesting questions which this volume suggests are very different, and are not beyond the resources of mundane criticism. What is a good letter? Why are Byron's letters so good?

I have sometimes doubted whether any one knows how to write. If Shakespeare could have been brought before a Royal Commission, and asked how he wrote his Plays, could he have given an answer intelligible to the Commissioners? He might have said, 'The best in this kind are but shadows, and the worst are no worse if imagination amend them.' And the Commissioners could only have replied, 'It must be your imagination, and not ours.' That is the highest form of writing, the intellectual process of which even Tennyson declared that he could form no conception. *A Midsummer Night's Dream* is infinitely great. A letter, even a nice letter, may be infinitely little, and yet one may be almost as hard to explain as the other. Madame de Sévigné, the object of a worship which does not

always keep on this side idolatry, told her daughter that simplicity was everything. Such simplicity as Madame de Sévigné's is a highly artificial product. Posterity has been mercifully spared the simplicity of Madame de Grignan. No one ever felt after reading one of Byron's letters that he could by any possibility improve it. That is a test, perhaps, but it is hardly an explanation, and certainly not a guide. Byron as a letter-writer may be easily praised by negatives. He does not preach, or argue, or soliloquise, or refine. Egoist as he was, he never forgets his correspondent. His letters are not essays, or lectures, or leading articles, or even fragments of autobiography. They are just what they profess to be, and nothing more. From the vice of discretion, which spoils so many letters, they are conspicuously free. These, however, are not positive merits. It is so easy to say what things are not, and so difficult to say what they are. Like a well-known politician when he opposed the Liquor Bill, Byron was full of his subject. He dashed into the heart of his theme, and came at once to the point. He had a perfect command of the English language, which an Englishman may be excused for regarding as the noblest instrument of human thought. His ideas were not often profound, but they were invariably clear and precise. He knew exactly what he meant to say before he began to say it, and as to how he would say it he was embarrassed only by the richness of his resources. But that is not all. Genius can do most things, but not everything, and unaided genius could not have produced Byron's letters. He was an omnivorous reader. As a literary critic he stands below men whose intellectual capacity was vastly inferior to his own. While he greatly admired the verses of the late Mr. Gifford, he could see no merit in

Wordsworth and very little in Keats. He put Crabbe above Coleridge, and Pope above Milton. All the same, his mind was full of those 'jewels five words long which on the stretched forefinger of all time sparkle for ever.' He must have known an appreciable proportion of Shakespeare by heart. Of Shakespeare he sometimes wrote disrespectfully, though I doubt whether he meant what he said. His letters are full of Shakespearean quotations, always most happily applied, and it would be an instructive exercise, as well as a delightful amusement, for a young man who could tear himself from Ibsen and Zola to disentangle them. He cannot describe a crush at the opera in Venice without remarking that in shouldering his way through it he almost beat a Venetian and traduced the State. He seems at times to have thought in Shakespeare, to have been unable, as Macaulay said of himself, to get away from him. It is rather the fashion to decry mere reading, and to insist that a uniform system of superficial education is worse than useless. There is truth in the weighty lines:

> He who reads
> Incessantly, and to his reading brings not
> A spirit and judgment equal or superior,
> Uncertain and unsettled still remains,
> Deep-versed in books and shallow in himself.

The Letters of the Illiterate may be a discovery of the future. I do not myself believe in them. On the contrary, I feel sure that all the best letter-writers in the English tongue show, without the need of formal assurance, what books they have read most and know best.

Byron was in no danger of becoming the mere bookworm described by Milton. His spirit and judgment, if not equal or superior to Shakespeare's, were quite equal to the task of preserving him against the

loss of originality. If his originality lay rather in expression than in ideas, the object of a letter is, after all, not to enlarge the bounds of human thought. It is to amuse, to please, to excite sympathy and interest, to keep up friendship and annihilate distance. The charm of a perfect letter for the receiver is the sense of private property in what would be famous if it were known. Carlyle might have praised his wife without indulging in sneers at 'scribbling Sands and Eliots.' But the publication of her letters has proved that he did not exaggerate their merits, and it was natural that when he got one he should feel her immense superiority to many popular authors. Byron enjoyed his full share of popularity, and, as some think, more than he deserved. He is, perhaps, the favourite poet of unpoetical people. If Moore and Murray realised, as no doubt they did, the transcendent excellence of his letters, they may well have been proud. Byron loved to accuse Moore, a model husband and father, of corrupting his morals. It was all, he said, those amatory poems of Thomas Little, as Moore called himself, which led him astray. He made this joke so often, that with anybody else it would be tedious. But Byron is never tedious, at least in prose. Another of his favourite butts was his mother-in-law, who 'has been dangerously ill, but is now dangerously well again.' Jests about mothers-in-law are as old as Greek literature, and are perhaps the most intolerable of all jokes. Byron could extract wit even from the degrees of affinity, and indeed from everything. On hearing from Murray that one Johnson had advertised an edition of his poems with the approval of the author, he observed, 'Few things surprise me, or this probably would; most things amuse me, or this probably would not.' One can almost see this sentence

shaping itself as he wrote. Yet how good it is, and how witty—a perfect example of 'what oft was thought, but ne'er so well expressed.' Tous les styles sont bons, hormis l'ennuyeux. If that be true more particularly of one thing than another, it is especially true of a letter. There are many excellent letter-writers who do not in the least resemble Byron, and Byron's qualities are therefore not an adequate ground on which to form a theory. It can be said of them, however, that they are consummate specimens of the art. They have rivals. They have no superiors. No one, so far as I am aware, has ever attempted to imitate them, and perhaps that is as well.

The calm and rational spirit of the eighteenth century, against which Byronism was a sort of reaction, fostered the most leisurely of the arts. That attractive epoch when people could be religious without fuss, and virtuous without strain, is distinguished by few things more than by the inimitable letters of Pope, Gray, and Cowper. Lady Mary Wortley, though not equal to those three, attained to a very high order of excellence, far higher in my opinion than either Lord Chesterfield or Horace Walpole. While it would be paradoxical to cite Cowper, with his terrible fits of religious mania, as a type of mental balance and repose, it is nevertheless true that so long as he was sane at all, nobody was saner than he. For a very different, but a charming specimen of easy and agreeable talk on paper, the polished and yet spontaneous thoughts of a wit, a scholar, and a man of the world, often hurried and yet never slovenly, what can be more delightful than Wilkes's letters to his daughter? 'Jack,' said Dr. Johnson, 'is a scholar, and Jack is a gentleman.' The fact that he was writing to his daughter imposed upon him, as Sir George Trevelyan has remarked, just that amount of restraint which the

natural coarseness of his mind required. One can hardly think of the eighteenth century without the 'savage and unholy genius of Swift.' Mr. Morley's fine and memorable phrase, which I have ventured to quote, is not too harsh. For even in the *Journal to Stella*, a series of letters, as everybody knows, to Hester Johnson and Mrs. Dingley, there is the constant impression of a great, gloomy, cynical mind, through which sentiment, affection, even friendship, ring hollow and insincere. Of Swift as a statesmen and a pamphleteer it is hardly possible to speak too highly. But what had Stella and Vanessa, what had the more human instincts and the softer emotions to do with that mighty instrument of destruction and self-torture, that misanthropic humour which never smiles, and laughs only with the wrong side of the mouth? As a narrative the *Journal to Stella* is beyond praise. It is a classic which criticism can no longer touch. But considering it simply as a specimen of letter-writing it seems to me to have two faults. The 'baby language' is terribly out of character, and there is too much of it. That is one thing. A more serious objection is that Swift would try to make love though he did not know what love meant. The man who best understood him, who felt for him the sympathy of genius, whose own moral character was so beautiful that it almost dwarfs his intellectual eminence, has told the truth about Swift better than it had been told before, or can be told again. I have never been able to understand why Sir Walter Scott's *Life of Swift* does not rank with the great biographies of the world. Letters cannot be understood without the character which they reveal, and Swift's character was thoroughly appreciated by that wholesome, tolerant, manly soul.

Cowper's Letters, the glory of the English lan-

guage, are, as models, above even Byron's. I do not say that they have been, or could be, copied. In their apparent simplicity there is exquisite art, and their style is almost perfect. They are the joint product of the age and the man. Some men, of whom Swift was one, have an individuality too strong to be affected by their surroundings. Others, like Lord Chesterfield in his Correspondence (not in his statesmanship), are mere echoes of their time. Cowper belongs to neither class. He had of course no sympathy with the mocking scepticism which disfigured the eighteenth century, and which becomes almost wearisome even in that prince of letter-writers, Voltaire. Yet he was emphatically the man of the period, when, as has been acutely said, the world for the first time since the days of Pliny had leisure to contemplate virtue. His humour was quite as genuine as his piety. His judgment in the affairs of the world was keen and sure. Even in religion, which, by a strange irony of fate, wrecked the peace and destroyed the mind of as true a saint as ever lived, he would probably have kept his balance if it had not been for the evil influence of John Newton. Cowper was an hereditary Whig, who took the strongest interest in politics, and whose political opinion is always worth having. When Prussia and Austria declared war against France to put down the Revolution, thereby causing the September massacres, the death of the King, and the reign of terror, Cowper protested in an admirable letter against an unjustifiable interference with the rights of the French people. Fox could not have analysed the situation with more force and sense. Pitt would have agreed with every word, and would have continued to act upon Cowper's principles if he had cared for anything more than power. But of course the interest of Cowper's letters is not

mainly political. He was, when not under the cloud of a melancholy falsely called religious and really physical, the most genial and social of men. Women delighted in his conversation and correspondence, as he delighted in theirs. He could even, if the phrase may be used of a man, flirt, and his humour has perhaps been underrated because it had no sting. When Samuel Rogers was asked why he said such ill-natured things, he replied, 'I have a very low voice; and if I did not say ill-natured things, no one would hear what I said. Cowper was never ill-natured, but the humour which produced *John Gilpin* overflows his letters, and is one secret of their charm.

He was full of affection, and he wrote to those he loved. He thought of them more than of himself, and that is a greater quality than style. Who cares for a letter written in haste to fulfil an obligation or occupy a spare half-hour? It is no compliment, and it gives no pleasure. A telegram or a postcard would be equally flattering and equally interesting. The eighteenth century was not troubled with those particular abominations. But it abounded in conceited coxcombs who wrote to show their cleverness and to amuse themselves. What did Walpole care for Sir Horace Mann? As much, or as little, as Lord Chesterfield cared for his son. Cowper's affection for Lady Hesketh and Mrs. Unwin is one of the prettiest episodes in literature. Heine said, with mordant wit and singular brutality, that every woman wrote with one eye on the public, and the other on some man, except the Princess Hahn-Hahn, who had only one eye. He did not say where that was. Cowper never had one eye on the public when he was writing to his friends. It would be going too far to assert that no good letters have ever been written for publication.

But the excellence of public letters, such as Sydney Smith's to 'Peter Plymley' and Archdeacon Singleton, is of a different kind. They are letters only in name. They are essays or state papers in reality. Sydney Smith's own familiar correspondence is quite another thing, and a very good thing too. The father of letter-writing was Cicero, and he had two styles. There is the formal style of the Epistle to his brother Quintus, which is what we ordinarily mean by Ciceronian. There is the familiar style of the Letters to Atticus and to various other friends, from which all formality has disappeared. These are, I suppose, by common consent, the best letters in the world. Whether grave or gay, whether lively or severe, they reflect the changing moods of a versatile, ingenious, sensitive, subtle, powerful, and cultivated mind.

Except comparison with the letters of Cowper there are few tests to which one could not fearlessly submit the letters of Gray. Dr. Johnson seldom said a stupid thing. But if it be true that he called Gray a 'barren rascal,' he did as much to injure his own critical reputation as could be done by a single phrase. 'Why should I be always writing?' asked the doctor himself in a more compact and rational frame of mind. Gray was not always writing. It is enough for his fame that he never wrote without writing well, and that cannot be said of the really great man who scolded him. The author of that immortal Elegy whose classic perfection no ignoble use can soil, and which all who love literature love, has suffered, like 'Single-speech Hamilton,' from the splendour of one performance. Hamilton made other speeches, but the world ignores them. Few remember that Gray was a satirist of almost the highest order, and Mr. Gosse's edition of the *Letters* revealed him in a new

character, if not to men of reading, at least to men of the world. They want the ease, the sparkle, the refined colloquial grace of Cowper's. They reflect the mind of a scholar and a recluse. Cowper's classical attainments were considerable, though the public do well to forget that he tried his hand upon Homer. But Gray's scholarship was far more accurate and his learning far more solid. He might have been a Professor of Greek or Latin, and Porson himself had not a more passionate love of the classics, or a keener appreciation of their beauties. He wrote at his best when he was writing to scholars like Mason and Warton, who shared his enthusiasm and sympathised with his tastes. 'The Sicilian expedition, is it or is it not the finest thing you ever read in your life?' So he asks after reading again the Seventh Book of Thucydides, and indeed it is not an easy question for any one to answer. Yet Gray could discuss public matters with sense and spirit, as, for instance, the Great Commoner's peerage. 'What shall I say to you about the Minister?' he writes to Dr. Warton on the 26th of August, 1766. 'I am as angry as a common council man of London about my Lord Chatham: but a little more patient, and will hold my tongue to the end of the year. In the mean time, I do mutter in secret and to you, that to quit the House of Commons, his natural strength, to sap his own popularity and grandeur (which no one but himself could have done) by assuming a foolish title, and to hope that he could win by it and attach to him a Court that hate him, and will dismiss him as soon as ever they dare, was the weakest thing that ever was done by so great a man.' These few sentences are an excellent illustration of what letter-writing should be. They are clear, informal, careless in appearance, artistic in arrangement. 'I do

mutter in secret and to you.' Horace Walpole did not mutter in secret to Sir Horace Mann. He wrote for his friend as he wrote for the public, twisting and torturing the English language with the help of foreign idiom to express the pompous triviality which he mistook for worldly wisdom. Gray was not addressing the nation, he was addressing Dr. Warton. Yet he gave him of his best, he paid him the true compliment of writing to him what was not meant for publication, and yet was quite good enough to be published. When Cicero told Atticus at the end of a letter that he would not have written so freely if he had not been convinced that Atticus alone would read what he wrote, he was quite sincere. It was only at the end of his life, when he knew that Tiro had been making a collection of his letters, that he thought of their being published after his death, and then it was happily too late for him to change his style. The suspicion that a private letter is not really private deprives it of more than half its interest. One immediately (such is human nature even among Christians) begins to imagine that this is how the author would like us to believe that he wrote to his friends, which is just what the most inquisitive reader does not want to know.

Eminent men must, I suppose, often reflect upon the possibility that after they have gone their private correspondence, or part of it, may go to the printers. Even love-letters are not sacred, at least in France. Prosper Mérimée can hardly have contemplated the publication of his *Lettres à une Inconnue*. Yet the world is much indebted to Mademoiselle Dacquin, and Mérimée's reputation is none the worse. After Mirabeau's letters to Sophie de Monnier, Mérimée's have the coldness and the chastity of a cloister. Mérimée was such a con-

summate master of epistolary French that he may perhaps have wondered whether some of his correspondents, such as Panizzi, would publish them or not. But that is quite a different think from designing the publicity of a particular letter. Pope was the most artificial of men. His tricks and dodges were so numerous and so unpleasant that the most learned of his biographers, Mr. Whitwell Elwin, gave up in disgust the task of ferreting them out. Yet Pope could write naturally enough to Teresa and Martha Blount, mysterious as his relations with them were. At the end of one of the earliest letters, however, there is this significant passage: 'When this letter is printed for the wit of it, pray take care that what is underlined be printed in a different character.' The injunction has been obeyed, though the passage is quite unworthy of italics. In the same letter, which is addressed to the elder sister, Teresa, he writes:

> You are to understand, Madame, that my *violent* passion for you yourself and your sister has been divided with the most wonderful regularity in the world. Even from my infancy I have been in love with one after the other of you, week by week, and my journey to Bath fell out in the three hundred and seventy-sixth week of my sovereign lady Martha. At the present writing hereof it is the three hundred and eighty-ninth week of the reign of your most serene Majesty, in whose service I was listed some weeks before I beheld her. This information will account for my writing to either of you hereafter, as she shall happen to be Queen Regent at that time.

This is a pretty specimen of a style in which Pope, almost alone among Englishmen, excelled. His letters to the Miss Blounts are, I think, the most interesting because the most characteristic part of his correspondence. When he wrote to Swift or Arbuthnot he wrote well indeed, but well in a fashion neither difficult nor uncommon. When he wrote to these ladies, with whom his intimacy never ceased, he adopted a tone which is perhaps the most trying of all tones to keep up for a

long time. His choice between the sisters was soon made. It was Martha to whom he gave his heart, or such substitute for a heart as Nature had given him. But his correspondence with both of them was what some people call romantic, and others gallant. Sir Walter Scott compares it with the *Journal to Stella*, which, he says, contains no such element. I am not concerned with the decency of Pope's mind or the morality of his life. I am dealing with him simply as a letter-writer, and these letters seem to me exquisite specimens of love-making on paper. With Lady Mary Wortley, Pope was always affected and insincere when he was not coarse and insolent. With the Blounts he is tender, sympathetic, playful, and affectionate. Nothing can be less tolerable than this sort of letter unless it be composed with extreme skill and tact. No kind of letter is, as a rule, less suitable for publication. There are perils on every side—perils of absurdity, perils of exaggeration, perils of false sentiment, perils of bad taste. It is Pope's glory that he has surmounted them all. The 'portentous cub,' as Bentley called him, was so amazingly clever that he could act the part of a chivalrous gentleman. If anyone were to call Pope the cleverest man who ever lived, it would be easier to contradict than to disprove the assertion. He wrote the *Essay on Man* without knowing philosophy; he translated Homer without knowing Greek. But it was perhaps as a letter-writer that his cleverness was most conspicuous. Self-absorbed egoist as he actually was, he wrote as if his correspondent were the only person for whom he cared.

> You have asked me news [he writes to Martha] a thousand times at the first word you spoke to me; which some would interpret as if you expected nothing better from my lips: and truly it is not a sign

two lovers are together when they can be so impertinent as to inquire what the world does. All I mean by this is that either you or I cannot be in love with the other: I leave you to guess which of the two is that stupid and insensible creature, so blind to the other's excellences and charms.

Many people may say that this kind of letter is not worth writing. But few will deny that Pope could write it admirably well. The mere story of the *Rape of the Lock* was certainly not worth telling. It is the way of telling it that makes the poem. Nine hundred and ninety-nine love-letters out of a thousand are the most insipid of human compositions, fit only to be read amid 'roars of laughter' in a court of justice, facetiously so called. The thousandth, or perhaps the hundred thousandth, is from some one who can write like Pope or Mérimée. Which is the more important, what people do or how they do it? The question is older than Pope, and has not been answered yet.

Victor Hugo says, in one of his letters, that there is no such thing as good English prose. Men of genius are colossal even in their blunders. The illustrious Frenchman, however, had an obvious excuse. When Cardinal Newman pronounced the shield of the spirit to be the one safeguard against German criticism, Dr. Martineau observed that another was ignorance of the German language. If Victor Hugo had known English, his statement would have been more interesting, though it would not have been less ridiculous. There is a curious superstition, not confined to Frenchmen, about the unique excellence of French prose. To depreciate it would indeed show deplorable barbarity. But it is a poor sort of criticism which can only praise one thing at the expense of another. For the countrymen of Hooker and Bacon, of Shakespeare and Milton, of Dryden and Swift, of Sterne and Hume, of Burke and Goldsmith,

of Charles Lamb and Sydney Smith, of Newman and Ruskin, to admit their own inferiority, 'has all the invidiousness of self-praise and all the reproach of falsehood.' There is no branch of English literature in which the ease and grace of our mother tongue are more conspicuous than they are in the familiar correspondence given by chance or piety to the world. Two women of strong character and great mental capacity, separated by more than a century of time, as well as by infinite diversity of circumstances, temper, and pursuits, have shown that here, at all events, there is no disqualification of sex. I mean Lady Mary Wortley and Mrs. Carlyle. Lady Mary Pierrepont, afterwards Lady Mary Wortley, and finally (but life is short), Lady Mary Wortley Montagu, had the classical education received as a matter of course by Queen Elizabeth and Lady Jane Grey, and now revived at Girton and Newnham. She was indeed a far better scholar than most educated men of her own and the next generation. She had a thorough knowledge of Latin and Greek. They were content with a knowledge of Latin and a hazy inspection of the Greek alphabet. But it was not her education alone that was masculine. She said herself that there were only two sorts of people, men and women. She was an illustration in her own person of the truth that there is a masculine element in almost every woman, as there is a feminine element in almost every man. She abounded in the manly virtues, and she was not intolerant of manly vices. Some of her letters from Turkey, to which she accompanied her husband when he became ambassador at Constantinople, would furnish a very misleading clue to the sex of the writer. She loved travel and adventure as much as she loved reading and writing. She had the keenest appreciation of beauty in her own

sex, and was never jealous of a pretty woman. As a letter-writer she has almost every merit except perhaps humour. Her descriptions of scenery, of persons, of customs, but above all of men and women, are what would now be called realistic, except that the literary form is never wanting. She drew with a free hand and painted with a large brush. There are in her work no fine shades, no nice distinctions, but broad effects cleverly conceived and vigorously rendered. It is difficult to quote from letters so flowing and so complete that taking out a sentence is like taking out a brick. But there is a passage in her letter to Pope from Adrianople, dated the 1st of April, 1717, that exhibits all the qualities of her style. The delicate flattery which leads her to suggest that she was dependent upon Pope for her knowledge of Homer is not of course serious. She was a far better scholar than he.

I read over your Homer here [she writes] with an infinite pleasure, and find several little passages explained that I did not before entirely comprehend the beauty of; many of the customs and much of the dress then in fashion being yet retained, and I don't wonder to find more remains here of an age so distant than is to be found in any other country, the Turks not taking that pains to introduce their own manners as has been generally practised by other nations that imagine themselves more polite. It would be too tedious to you to point out all the passages that relate to the present customs. But I can assure you that the princesses and great ladies pass their time at their looms, embroidering veils and robes, surrounded by their maids, which are always very numerous, in the same manner as we find Andromache and Helen described. The description of the belt of Menelaus exactly resembles those that are now worn by the great men, fastened before with broad golden clasps and embroidered round with rich work. The snowy veil that Helen throws over her face is still fashionable, and I never see (as I do very often) half a dozen of old pashas with their reverend beards, basking in the sun, but I recollect good King Priam and his counsellors. Their manner of dancing is certainly the same that Diana is said to have danced on the banks of the Eurotas. The great lady still leads the dance, and is followed by a troop of young girls who imitate her steps, and if she sings make up the chorus.

Had ever translator a more deliciously appreciative correspondent?

Lady Mary's letters have long been celebrated, and her quarrel with Pope has not diminished her fame. That imp of genius had the knack of conferring immortality alike upon his enemies and his friends. When Boswell took upon himself to criticise the *Dunciad*, he was authoritatively told that he had missed his chance by not being alive when it was written. Mrs. Carlyle quarrelled only with her husband, which is dull, domestic, and seldom worth while. It may be accident, it may be Mr. Carlyle's literary eminence, it may be the extravagances of his posthumous worship and pitiful remorse, but I cannot help thinking that Mrs. Carlyle has never received the public gratitude which her letters deserve. They seem to me some of the best we have, and that on account of qualities by no means common. Her powers of observation were singularly searching, and her insight almost supernaturally keen. No weakness escaped her, no pretence imposed upon her, no form of human folly was too evanescent for the quickness of her eyes. Her humour was almost as rich, racy, and varied as his. They were too much alike for their own happiness. The forbidden degrees of similarity would make a new table more useful than the old. Mrs. Carlyle's letters do not give one an altogether cheerful view of life, or leave a wholly pleasant taste in the mouth. They make one want to read the thirteenth chapter of the First Epistle to the Corinthians, and, indeed, one might at any time do worse. Mrs. Carlyle had not the charity which thinketh no evil, which suffereth long and is kind. Her humour was almost as sombre as Swift's, who, as Macaulay said, gives utterance to the most ludicrous fancies with the air of a man reading the Commination Service. But though she sometimes wrote a disagreeable letter, she never wrote a dull one. She was one of

those women who cannot be stupid if they try. A distinguished lawyer and scholar, the delight and ornament of every company that he honoured with his presence, described her as 'an excellent woman, with almost too great a passion for insecticide.' Even that painful theme, however, became in her hands a source of amusement and a topic of interest. For those who prefer, the natural pathos of a humourist to the forced humour of a melancholy escaping from itself, there are few letters so beautiful and impressive as that in which Mrs. Carlyle, in 1849, after her father's death, narrates her solitary visit to Haddington. At Haddington she was born, and in the ruined abbey near the waters of the Tyne she is buried.

It was difficult for me to realise that the people inside were only asleep, and not dead—dead since many years Ah! one breathed freer in the churchyard, with the bright morning sunshine streaming down on it, than near that (so-called) habitation of the living! I went straight from one to the other. The gate was still locked, for I was an hour before my time; so I made a dash at the wall, some seven feet high I should think, and dropt safe on the inside—a feat I should never have imagined to try in my actual phase, not even with a mad bull at my heels, if I had not trained myself to it at a more elastic age. Godefroi Cavaignac's 'Quoi donc, je ne suis pas mort!' crossed my mind; but I had none of that feeling. *Moi* was *morte* enough, I knew, whatever face one might put on it; only, what one has well learnt one never forgets.

Never were letters less prepared for publication than Mrs. Carlyle's. Their spontaneity is part of their charm. They are full of references to phrases and stories of which she and her husband were fond. No one understood the art of allusion more thoroughly, and it is a great art. Charles Dickens was perhaps the most consummate master of it in fiction, and Abraham Lincoln in real life. There is no tendency which requires stricter control. A forced reference, the violent intrusion of a totally irrelevant anecdote which the writer is burning to tell, would spoil the best of letters or the best of

talk. The old grouse in the gunroom was a nuisance before Goldsmith's time, and is a nuisance still. On the other hand, the story or incident which, differing in all its external circumstances from the topic of the moment, touches as with a needle the real point, is the sauce of conversation and of letter-writing. It should never be explained, because it should never require explanation. In that storehouse of wit and wisdom, Selden's *Table Talk*, it is told how a rider asked a countryman whether he could get to Oxford that evening. The countryman replied, 'Yes, if you don't ride too fast.' Selden drew no moral. He left his hearers to point that for themselves. There are few injunctions which deserve so well to be obeyed as the French *N'appuyez pas*.

If Mrs. Carlyle has not received her due as a graphic and powerful letter-writer, she has suffered in good company. The two greatest historians who have written in English were both admirable correspondents. Until Lord Sheffield permitted last year the publication of Gibbon's remains in full, the world had an imperfect opportunity of appreciating the high and rare qualities of his familiar style. His Autobiography, with all its singular beauty and charm, partakes of the pomp and grandeur which, like the band at a soldier's funeral, accompany the decline and fall of the Roman Empire. His letters are simple, natural, and amusing. The humour which seldom suffers the stately periods of the History to overstep the narrow line between the sublime and the ridiculous sheds a sympathetic ray over his delightful correspondence with his stepmother and with Lady Sheffield. Like his talk, which attracted men and women quite incapable of appreciating his vast erudition, his letters

are perfect specimens of a great mind at ease. They are never careless, they are always the best he can do. He had too much courtesy and too much self-respect to become slovenly when he had not to think of posterity or the printer. All the resources of his imperial intellect were for the time at the disposal of his correspondent, man or women, relative or friend. There is no appearance of effort, and yet the dust of his writings is gold. Gibbon's letters are too fresh in the recollection of every one who reads anything to justify a critical panegyric. Macaulay's may perhaps be less remembered, if not less known. It is twenty-two years since Sir George Trevelyan published his classical biography, and proved that his uncle was something besides an orator, a scholar, a statesman, and an historian. This is certainly not the place for a formal vindication of the greatest of the Whigs. It is the fashion to say that Macaulay's *History* is a misplaced eulogy of a second-rate Dutchman, that his Essays are only fit for schoolboys, that his verse is mere rhetoric, and that he wrote a style in which the truth could not be told. He appealed to Cæsar. When he was composing his unfinished narrative, he had the year 2000 in view. He abides the judgment which cannot be reversed. Those who learned from him in their youth the ineradicable lesson that history is politics and that politics are history, share his confidence in the result. It seems to be certain that the idea of his letters, or any of them, being published never crossed Macaulay's mind. They are therefore the spontaneous utterance of a man who when he was writing for the public gave his whole energy to the composition of every sentence. They show that he thought in good English, but an English quite different

from the formal language of his essays and speeches. It is a platitude that Macaulay was the most sensitive of literary artists. He was as incapable of undue familiarity with the public or the House of Commons as of writing an essay to his sister, or of making a speech in his own dining-room. He did not show off to his correspondents, he told them what he thought they wanted to know. A good essay would always make a bad letter, even if time meant as little to busy men and women in a strenuous age as it meant to Harriet Byron and Clarissa Harlowe. Macaulay's letters are less subtle and more obvious than Gibbon's. But they are fresher and simpler. Most of them abound in high spirits and good temper. Not one of them contains a sentence which is either slipshod or obscure.

Mr. Jowett, as may be read in his Life, was a great lover of Boswell, and especially fond of the inimitable passage in which the prince of biographers describes Dr. Johnson's meeting with Wilkes at Mr. Dilly's. He challenged those who thought meanly of Boswell's intellectual powers to attempt a similar description of any entertainment, and then to compare the two. For the immortal narrative in question the company as well as the narrator were required. But the descriptive faculty is a large part of a letter-writer's mental furniture, and it was in this line that Macaulay excelled. He was neither fanciful nor given to speculation, and though not without a robust sense of fun which felt the stimulus of anything odd or absurd, the quaint and incongruous elements of life did not strike him as they strike the born humourist. What he could do was to describe the results of his keen observation with unrivalled terseness and accuracy. A single example will suffice:

Since I wrote to you [he tells his sister Hannah on the 4th of July, 1831,] I have been out to dine and sleep at Holland House. We had a very agreeable and splendid party; among others the Duke and Duchess of Richmond and the Marchioness of Clanricarde, who, you know, is the daughter of Canning. She is very beautiful, and very like her father, with eyes full of fire, and great expression in all her features. She and I had a great deal of talk. She showed much cleverness and information, but, I thought, a little more political animosity than is quite becoming in a pretty woman. However, she has been placed in peculiar circumstances. The daughter of a statesman who was a martyr to the rage of faction may be pardoned for speaking sharply of the enemies of her parent, and she did speak sharply. With knitted brow and flashing eyes, and a look of feminine vengeance about her beautiful mouth, she gave me such a character of Peel as he would certainly have had no pleasure in hearing.

Not one of these plain sentences looks, or perhaps is, beyond the capacity of any educated person, and yet observe how completely the writer achieves his purpose. He wanted to give a girl in the country an account of a dinner party at Holland House, and of his own share in it. That may appear simple enough. But, as Mr. Jowett said in the case of Boswell, How many people can do it? There is none of the egoism so often imputed to Macaulay. Egoists may write very good letters, as, for instance, Byron and Pope. But this kind of letter, the kind of letter in which Macaulay excelled, would be spoilt by it. Hannah Macaulay knew all about her brother, and the way he talked. She knew nothing about Lady Clanricarde. In the letter, therefore, Lady Clanricarde is everything, and he is nothing. There is a time for self-suppression, and a time, though not so often as most of us suppose, for self-assertion. What is implied need not be asserted, and in description there is implied the personality of the describer. He is, so to speak, the point of view. The reader sees with his eyes, hears with his ears, and thinks with his mind.

If Macaulay's letters are not in the highest class of all, it is because they are almost exclusively descriptive.

They have great interest and value. As fragments of contemporary history written in ignorance of the event they can hardly be overrated. But—if there must always be a 'but'—they are too much of one kind, and too much of a piece. We miss the irregularity of Sydney Smith, to whom ludicrous fancies occur as he writes, and who follows them without scruple when they come. Macaulay's individuality was too strongly marked, and so was Sydney Smith's for that matter, to let him take the colour of his correspondent's mind. If the aim of a letter be to give pleasure, the best letters are joint compositions. The charm of reading a letter which you feel that you have half written yourself is as real as it is indescribable. A one-sided correspondence is a contradiction in terms, and yet it is all that we usually get. Writing, like talking, ought to be mutual. No man, and certainly no woman, could go on in actual life writing a series of letters which were never answered. As a jest lies in the ear of him that hears, and not only in the mouth of him that utters it, so a letter must depend upon the person to whom it is addressed. I can imagine no more conclusive proof of excellence in letters than that they disclose the character of the recipient as well as of the author. For fear I should seem to be recklessly paradoxical, I will give an instance of what I mean. Fanny Burney's affectionate epistles to Mr. Crisp, 'Daddy Crisp,' as she called him, have that quality. They give one a very good idea of what that strange, acute, benevolent victim of wounded vanity was like. They tell us more about him than about the author of *Evelina*. Apart from letters of circumstance or occasion, which are seldom interesting or characteristic, it takes two to write a letter, as it takes two to make a quarrel. There ought surely to be a collection

of the few famous letters which are works of art in themselves, or to which historical circumstances give a peculiar interest of their own. They are a class apart. Dr. Johnson's letter to Lord Chesterfield is perhaps the best known example. The Doctor did not shine as an ordinary correspondent, but he was a master of satirical invective, and rage improved his style. The letter in which Lord Melbourne explained why he did not re-appoint Lord Brougham in 1835 is an absolutely perfect specimen of courtesy, dignity, and truth. He had to say that his reasons were first Brougham's character, secondly his conduct, and he said it without offence. Mr. Gladstone's letter on the character of Lord Aberdeen, printed in Lord Stanmore's Life of his father, is a singularly noble and impressive tribute to a high-minded and unselfish statesman, not wholly unlike the great closing passage of the *Agricola*. English literature is enriched by these memorable documents, which are letters, though letters of a special type. They are complete in themselves, requiring neither introduction nor sequel.

Matthew Arnold, in one of those curious outbursts of exaggerated emphasis from which an English Academy of Letters might perhaps have saved him, pronounced Shelley's letters superior to his lyrics. The errors of genius are often more valuable than the stolid accuracy of unimaginative critics. *The Skylark* and the *Stanzas written in Dejection* are in no danger. They are not, as Shelley himself said of *Adonais*, destined to everlasting oblivion. The letters, on the other hand, cannot be praised too highly except by adopting Mr. Arnold's hasty paradox. If he meant, as he probably did mean, that they were underrated, he was perfectly right. Could Victor Hugo have read them, they would have been quite

enough to show him the absurdity of his sneer at English prose. The work of a man who was nothing if not a poet, whose thoughts naturally shaped themselves in a poetical form, they have the just measure and the true value of a language in which everything can be expressed. If Shelley had not written them, or if they had not been preserved, we should never have known the full powers of that original and fertile mind. Rich cadence and subtle harmony might have been assumed in Shelley. But there is more in the letters. There is consummate mastery of the English tongue, there is perfect discrimination between the scansion of poetry and the rhythm of prose, there are eloquence, and wisdom, and insight, and humour. Nobody understood more thoroughly than Shelley the complex character of Byron, and from his letters a far more vivid idea of the man may be derived than from all the obsequious homage of Moore. Rome has been described out of all recognition by a thousand pens. 'The grave, the temple, and the wilderness' is nowhere so truly and at the same time so imaginatively portrayed as in Shelley's incomparable letters written from the spot. Shelley and Keats are for ever associated in the noblest personal elegy since *Lycidas*. But that was not Shelley's only service to his brother genius. His letters about Keats are the best criticism upon the poet of whom Tennyson used to say that if he had lived he would have been the greatest of them all. Among the many interesting anecdotes and extracts contained in the diary of Sir Mountstuart Grant-Duff there is none, I think, more valuable than the remarks written by Bulwer Lytton in the fly-leaf of Herman Merivale's *Historical Studies*. The best criticism, says Bulwer, is enlightened enthusiasm. Few epigram are so absolutely true, and no phrase could be more

completely applicable to Shelley's criticism of Keats. Shelley protests that it is useless to come to him for facts, and things of this world. You might as well, he says, go to a gin-shop for a leg of mutton. But his lawyers, oddly enough, found him a good man of business, and however eccentric his behavour might sometimes be, even where women were not concerned, he had a sound appreciation of human nature.

What are letters without the personal element? They are like history without events, poetry without invention, Blue Books without dates, or novels without love. Shelley travelled about the world in as odd company as Candide and Dr. Pangloss, real flesh and blood as they were. If he had not Voltaire's wit, he had qualities, such as sympathy and imagination, in which the great Frenchman was deficient. Shelley's letters are not his only prose. His exquisite translation, which he called *The Banquet of Plato*, is even now the best English rendering of that inimitable and imperishable masterpiece. But one must go to his letters to feel and understand how he entered into the meaning and thought of Plato and Sophocles. He did not speak the literal truth when he said that having been in love with Antigone in a previous state of existence preserved him from merely human passion. But what is literal truth compared with the realisation of a poetic ideal? Charles Lamb who professed that he could not understand Shelley, and thought his poetry 'thin sown with profit or delight,' agreed with him in dislike of the literal. To understand Lamb literally was to misunderstand him, and accordingly, after the fashion of this world, he was frequently misunderstood. It was his friend Barton, if I remember, and not himself, who, having ordered a 'Prometheus Unbound,' received an Æschylus without a binding.

Lucky for him, said Lamb, that he did not order *Elfrida* in sheets. The preposterous delusion that the inhabitants of Scotland have no sense of humour originated, I believe, in Lamb's story of the four Scotsmen who, when he expressed a wish for the presence of Burns's sons at some festival in honour of the poet, simultaneously assured him that it was impossible, because they were dead. A true wish is always for the impossible, but even Englishmen ignore this principle. If the nineteenth century had no other title to remembrance, it would deserve distinction for having produced the letters of Charles Lamb and Edward Fitz-Gerald. Lamb, though born in 1775, owed less to the century of his birth than to the century in which he died. The literature of the eighteenth century interested him less than either the Elizabethan Plays or the Lake Poets. But, indeed, he was not the child of any age, but the spiritual heir of all the ages, and in his letters simply himself. They are not in the least like any one else's. They defy classification, and escape analysis. Humour and fancy run through them all, but it is Lamb's fancy and Lamb's humour. Nothing occurs in them but the unexpected. Almost everything he said was *παρὰ προσδοκίαν*, contrary to what reasonable men would have confidently reckoned upon his saying. When his sonnet was rejected he said, 'Damn the age, I will write for antiquity.' When his friend Dibdin was at Hastings, he advised him to

> go to the little church, which is a very Protestant Loretto and seems dropt by some angel for the use of a hermit, who was at once parishioner and a whole parish. It is not too big. Go in the night; bring it away in your portmanteau; and I will plant it in my garden. It must have been erected in the very infancy of British Christianity, for the two or three first converts; yet with it all the appurtenances of a church of the first magnitude—its pulpit, its pew, its baptismal font; a cathedral in a nutshell. Seven people would crowd it like a

Caledonian Chapel. The minister that divides the Word there must give lumping penny-worths. It is built to the text of 'two or three assembled in My name.' It reminds me of a grain of mustard seed. If the glebe-land is proportionate, it may yield two potatoes. Tithes out of it could be no more split than a hair. Its First Fruits must be its last, for 'twould never produce a couple. It is truly the strait and narrow way, and few there be (of London visitants) that find it. The still small voice is surely to be found there, if anywhere. A sounding board is surely there for ceremony. It is secure from earthquakes, not more from sanctity than from size, for 'twould feel a mountain thrown upon it no more than a taper-worm would. *Go and see, but not without your spectacles.*

One is reminded of Sydney Smith on the marriage of the stout lady. But Lamb is infinitely more various, and though he may be less funny, there is less strain in the process. Sydney Smith meant to exaggerate, and not to invent, when he said that any man could make himself a humourist by working at it for four hours a day. There is a mechanical element in his humour, delicious as the effects are. In Lamb's letters there is nothing of the sort. He is no more mechanical than Touchstone or Mercutio. He gives, like his master, to airy nothings a local habitation and a name.

Fitz-Gerald's celebrated translation or paraphrase from the Persian has unduly and unluckily overshadowed his other work. Tennyson considered the truly Platonic close of his Platonic dialogue *Euphranor* to be one of the finest passages in English prose. As a letter-writer he is so good that one really cannot want anything more. I am not going to quote him. I have quoted enough already, and his letters ought to be read straight through from the beginning to the end. He did not write often or much, or from a sense of duty, or to get an answer, or to discharge a debt. He did not even write because he had something to say—a fatal habit. He wrote because he could not help writing. To the classica scholar his letters are feasts. He lived with the classics, and a hint from him is worth more than a page of

average commentary. But their charm is universal. The world had no effect upon Fitz-Gerald. If he was in it—and he hardly seemed to be—he was certainly not of it. He lived with the distant and the unreal, with the books of the past, with the characters of fiction, with his own ideas. There is a perfect symmetry of careless ease in the style of his own correspondence, more agreeable to the intellectual taste than the most consummate elaboration of literary art. He was so steeped in that glorious literature which must fill every Englishman with personal humility and national pride that he never had to think about his phrases. He could not go wrong. He knew Greek and Latin and Spanish and Persian, if not French and German and Italian. Yet no trace of a foreign idiom can be found in him. The irregular beauty of his letters, like irregular beauty of another kind, is a refuge and refreshment from all weary and dreary things, such as the gossip of Parliament, the anecdotes of the Bar, the humour of the frivolous, and the conversation of the discreet.

*July*, 1898.

# THE GREAT TRACTARIAN

THE ninety 'Tracts for the Times,' or 'Tracts against the Times,' as Mrs. Browning called them, have fallen into deserved oblivion. The greatest tracts in the English language, the *Character of a Trimmer* and the *Anatomy of an Equivalent*, are the victims of unmerited neglect. It would be hard to say why; for no such accident has happened to the fame of their author.

George Savile, Marquis of Halifax, the idol of Macaulay, who describes him as the real author of the Revolution, was a conspicuous figure in the politics of his day, and the great Whig historian has done him ample justice. With every advantage of birth and fortune he combined a singularly acute and subtle intellect, oratorical power of the highest kind, a humour at once exquisite and profound, and a thorough knowledge of the world. His Life has at last been written by the learned and accomplished lady whose article in the *English Historical Review* for October, 1896, was so generally appreciated and admired. Miss Foxcroft has read and studied the manuscripts at Devonshire House and at Althorp. She has seen correspondence unseen by Macaulay, and her volumes probably contain all that will ever be known about Halifax. No other statesman of the seventeenth century is so like a statesman of the nineteenth. He had, as Macaulay says, a peculiar gift for anticipating the judgment of posterity. Miss

Foxcroft traces his foresight to his love of abstract speculation, which was undoubtedly strong. But there was more in it than that. The famous saying about Voltaire, 'Il a plus que personne l'esprit que tout le monde a,' might be applied to Halifax in modified form. He was more thoroughly imbued than any other Englishman with the English spirit of compromise. He was a born critic, and all objections occurred to him at once. William the Third, who more than once paid Halifax the compliment of calling himself a Trimmer, rebuked him in council for indecision. It was, no doubt, his fault. In 1688, when the Prince of Orange was on the point of actually sailing, Halifax drew back, and began to think, as was his wont, that there was something to be said for the losing side. He hated the insolence of triumph and always sympathised with the unsuccessful. Once, and only once, was he cruel to the fallen: when he went to tell King James that his Majesty must leave Whitehall he showed unusual harshness. But the King had made a fool of him, and ridicule, of which he was a master, was a thing he could not bear. And, indeed, the man who never lost his temper with James the Second could have had no temper to lose.

The eloquent and accomplished Trimmer was born in 1633. When he was eleven years old his father died, leaving him the head of an old Yorkshire family, and the inheritor of a baronetcy created by James the First. His great grandmother was a Talbot and his grandmother a Wentworth. His mother was a daughter of Lord Keeper Coventry, and from that great judge he may have derived his natural vigour of expression. In the year of his father's death his mother, then expecting her confinement, was besieged by the Parliamentarians

at Sheffield Castle, and the barbarity with which she seems to have been treated as the widow of a noted Royalist may have given the boy the horror of violence which remained with him through life. He had the singular honour of protesting against the execution of Lord Stafford, the last victim of Oates, and against the execution of Russell and Sidney, judicially murdered by the triumphant Tories. Halifax believed neither in extreme courses nor in the extreme punishment of those who adopted them. He had not much sympathy with enthusiasm, but he did not hate enthusiasts. He had, indeed, a remarkable power of understanding, and even sympathetically understanding, opinions which he did not hold. He was himself in theory a Republican. Of the hereditary principle he made open fun. No one, he said, would engage a coachman because his father had been one before him. Yet he respected the British Constitution almost superstitiously, and the British Monarchy as part of it. The republicanism of Halifax, which did not prevent him from serving Charles the Second and William the Third, or even from corresponding with James the Second at Saint-Germains, is not very difficult to explain. He was not, like Algernon Sidney, a Republican in the Cromwellian sense. He was a thorough aristocrat. The oldest republic then existing in the world, the Republic of Venice, was an intensely aristocratic institution, and Halifax was a firm believer in the natural authority of a governing class. He argued that even in the Navy, where skill and experience must count for someting, command should usually be given to men of high social station. Mr. Disraeli's description of the Whigs as a Venetian oligarchy was inspired by the lurid insight of hatred. Applied to the Whigs of his

own time it was grotesque. In the eighteenth, and still more in the seventeenth, century the phrase was not inapplicable, and I doubt whether the Whigs of the Revolution would have repudiated it. But of course the Dutch Republic was always present to Halifax's mind.

A cynical Tory said of a late eminent lawyer, 'Coleridge is a perfect specimen of a natural Radical. He never could bear the idea of any one above himself.' Lord Halifax did not much like it either, and I suspect that much of his reluctance to bring the Prince of Orange over may be thus explained. He knew that the Prince, whatever else he might be, would be no King Log. James the baffled oppressor would have been much easier to manage than William the triumphant deliverer. In the eyes of Halifax a monarchy was made far less mischievous by the weakness of the monarch. His public life began with the Restoration, and he sat in the Convention of 1660 as member for Pontefract. He was then twenty-seven, Sir George Savile, the owner of a splendid estate, and had been four years married. He was no sportsman, and cared nothing for horses or dogs; but he was devoted to the country, and for Rufford he had a peculiar love. It was not want of ambition, nor indifference to office, which drew him so often from the house he had built in St. James's Square to his Nottinghamshire woods. Although he described the work of Government as a rough thing compared with the fineness of speculative thought, he liked being in the centre, and enjoyed the conscious exercise of his great parliamentary powers. It was love of nature that drew him to Rufford, and not hatred of business or weariness of the world. The Convention was the only Parliament in which Sir George

Savile sat as a commoner. In 1668 he became Viscount Halifax, and a Commissioner of Trade. The House of Lords, which was not much larger then than the American Senate is now, exactly suited him. For a quarter of a century he delighted the Peers with his eloquence, his shrewdness, and his wit. Like the present Prime Minister, he saw the ridiculous side of everything, and if a ludicrous image presented itself to his mind, he always gave his audience the benefit of it. He had his joke and yet kept his estate. Bishop Burnet was a favourite theme of his pleasantry. He liked the Bishop's latitudinarian theology, but the Bishop's statesmanship always excited his merriment. Burnet once referred to his own speech as the salt which he had contributed to the debate. It was not, replied Halifax, of the sort which seasoned all things. For in that case there would have been less of it, and it would have been more to the purpose. Both in public and in private his humour was unmanageable and indiscreet. It is said that Danby never forgave Halifax's comment upon his reluctant refusal of a speculative offer for the privilege of farming the taxes. The Lord Treasurer, observed Halifax, reminded him of a man who, being asked for the use of his wife, declined in terms of great politeness. One of his comments has passed into a proverb. When in 1683 Lord Rochester was deprived of the Privy Seal, then an office of importance, and appointed to the dignified sinecure of Lord President, Halifax said that he had never before seen a man kicked upstairs. If any member of the present Cabinet were created a Peer, at least three newspapers would say the next morning that he had been kicked upstairs.

Against the Test Acts Lord Halifax both voted and spoke. It was this which enabled him afterwards

to address the Dissenters with so much effect against accepting the proposal of the King to include them in the dispensation from these statutes. He could say, and he did say, 'I am against all religious disabilities. But it is better to endure unjust exclusion from office than to put the King above the law.' It is more remarkable, considering his subsequent opposition to the Exclusion Bill, that he should have supported Lord Carlisle in providing against the marriage of Catholics with heirs to the throne. Charles, who at this time probably was a Catholic, though Halifax did not know ii, disliked him at first, and was with difficulty persuaded to nominate him on the Council of Thirty in 1679. But once there, he soon became a prime favourite with Charles, and was 'never from the King's elbow.' The King, though from always telling the same stories he came at last to be regarded as a bore, knew good company as well as any man in his dominions, and in all his dominions there was no better company than Halifax. His intellect was extraordinarily subtle, his wit was marvellously keen; he had studied, as Matthew Arnold says, in the book of the world rather than in the world of books. He took the King's measure accurately enough, as his famous *Character* shows. But nobody could amuse the King more, and there was nothing the King liked more than to be amused. The same year that he joined the Council Halifax was raised to an earldom, and obtained a still higher post of vantage from which to launch his satire against hereditary distinctions. He brought to that disreputable Court, and he did not lose in it, the rare and priceless gift of urbanity. Though essentially good-natured, and not in the least vindictive, he allowed no man's feelings to stand in the way of a jest, and his mocking spirit might

have made him many enemies. But it was almost impossible to be angry with Halifax. His own temper was so imperturbably serene, his breeding so perfect, his politeness so engaging, that he could say what he liked—and he always said what he liked—without giving offence. His manners, like all manners which are really good, were the reflection of a kind heart and a genial disposition. Cruelty and revenge were abhorrent to him.

The greatest of Halifax's parliamentary triumphs was his successful resistance to the Exclusion Bill in 1680. He was opposed to the first Lord Shaftesbury, the most adroit and versatile statesman of the age, a great lawyer, but not a mere lawyer, the ancestor of many able men, and by far the ablest of them all. When the House of Lords was in Committee on the Bill, Shaftesbury and Halifax spoke sixteen times in succession. Such a rhetorical duel has never been fought in Parliament since, not between Pitt and Fox, not between Peel and Russell, not between Gladstone and Disraeli. No word of it is left. But just as the chief debaters of the nineteenth century have always been told that they could not hope to rival Lord Plunket on the Union, so the future Earl of Chatham was assured that he could not equal the performances of Lord Halifax on the Exclusion Bill. The Bill was rejected, as the Habeas Corpus Act had been passed nearly twenty years before, by a very small majority. There were sixty Contents, and sixty-three Not Contents. There is an old tradition, or superstition, that speeches never change votes; but considering the closeness of the numbers, and the comparative looseness of party ties in the seventeenth century, the loss of the Exclusion Bill may fairly be attributed to the eloquence of Halifax, the Gotham of

Dryden, 'endued by nature, and by learning taught, to move assemblies.' The supreme importance of the vote is obvious. If the Exclusion Bill had passed both Houses and received the royal assent, which was then no fiction, the Crown would have devolved upon Mary at the death of Charles, the Prince of Orange would have been nominally no more than the Prince of Denmark was in the reign of Anne, and the country would have been spared the worst reign in English history. So at least it now seems. History, said Sir Arthur Helps, is spoiled for us by our knowledge of the event. Lord Halifax could predict events better than most people. But he was not infallible. He believed that conditions could be imposed upon James which James would be forced to accept. He underrated William of Orange. He held, perhaps correctly, that public opinion was not ripe for the exclusion of Catholics from the throne, and that a too militant Protestantism would lead to civil war. His views prevailed, and James marched without impediment to his doom. Jeffries and the Bloody Assize did what the Arguments of Shaftesbury had failed to do: they made England a Protestant country and Dutch William an English king. Reaction against the villainies of Oates, and repentance for the scandal of the Popish Plot, were powerful allies of the Duke of York. The stupidity and bigotry of James the Second wiped them out of existence, and Halifax himself could not, if he had tried, have explained away the trial of the seven Bishops. He stood by the Bishops, and visited them in the Tower. But he would not concur in the invitation to William. He was certainly not wanting in courage. The defence of unpopular causes and of still more unpopular persons had never had any terrors for him. But he would not, perhaps from temperament, go all lengths

with any faction. He played a leading part in the Revolutionary Settlement; it was he who, in the name of both Houses, offered the crown to William and Mary. His cavalier blood and his philosophic temper disqualified him for a revolutionary hero.

As Halifax held office under Charles the Second, it was natural, and perhaps inevitable, that he should be offered a bribe by the French Court. The agent employed was Barillon, the French Ambassador. But the attempt was futile. Although Halifax had not the contempt for worldly honours which he professed, was as anxious as Sir Walter Scott for the perpetuation of his family, and was rather fond of money than otherwise, he was above pecuniary corruption. Very few of his contemporaries were. He was certainly under no special temptation, for his estates were ample and they were not embarrassed. But

crescit amor nummi quantum ipsa pecunia crescit,

There is no greater fallacy than to assume that rich men cannot be corrupted and will not steal. The poor go to prison, but that is another story. It is one of Lord Halifax's many titles to respect and esteem that, in an age of low and coarse venality, he maintained a high standard of personal honour. His designs for the future failed. His son, the second Marquis, did not long survive him, and the peerage became extinct, though it was immediately afterwards revived for the benefit of Charles Montague. The baronetcy reverted to a distant kinsman, and descended in the middle of the eighteenth century to an eminent Whig universally esteemed. Lord Halifax's daughter, for whom he wrote his celebrated *Advice*, became the mother of Lord Chesterfield. Her husband is said to have inscribed upon his copy of the letter, 'Labour in vain,' and the marriage was not

a happy one. Stanhope appealed to his father-in-law, and Miss Foxcroft has printed Halifax's reply. It is the letter of a wise and kind man, full of sense and tact. Miss Foxcroft throws doubt upon the tradition, accepted by Macaulay, that Halifax was the father of Henry Carey, and consequently the ancestor of Edmund Kean. She suggests that the real father was the second Marquis, but her reasons are inconclusive.

Lord Halifax was not long in office under James the Second. No two men in the world could have had less in common. Halifax was graceful, subtle, dexterous, sceptical, and humane; James was dull, dogged, superstitious, and cruel. Halifax was a rigid and formal Constitutionalist; to James the Constitution was an impertinent check upon power which he believed himself to have derived from God. He at once set about to repeal the Test Act, which stood in the way of his religion, and the Habeas Corpus Act, which stood in the way of his tyranny. Halifax opposed him, and was at once, notwithstanding his services in the debates on the Exclusion Bill, struck off the Council. He was thus relieved of further responsibility for the most dismal and disastrous of all failures to enslave the English people. Dryden's *Hind and Panther* is commonly said to have been the one great literary work which the reign of James the Second produced. I venture to say that the *Character of a Trimmer*, the *Anatomy of an Equivalent*, and the *Letter to a Dissenter* are far more valuable contributions to the English language and to speculative thought.

Dryden, though a great poet and a magnificent writer of English prose, was no theologian. He cared no more for the differences between Protestants and Catholics than the Vicar of Bray himself. The *Hind*

*and the Panther*, though it contains many fine verses, is far below the standard of *Absalom and Achitophel*. Halifax, on the other hand, was a thorough master of his subject. He understood the art of politics as well as Richelieu, and the philosophy of politics as well as Montesquieu. He was equally at home in the abstract and in the concrete. His principles, though broad and comprehensive, were always capable of immediate application to the problems of the day. The great mistake of his life, his *gran rifiuto*, was his delay in joining the Revolution of 1688. It was certainly not made *per viltà*. The unpopularity of a cause, or of a man, always attracted instead of repelling him. When the world was turning from James to William, Halifax instinctively turned from William to James. He would rather not go far enough than go too far. He thought that anybody could be taught anything, and that therefore James the Second might be taught to keep his word. But James, as his *Memoirs* show, was the most logical of men. He held that there could be no binding obligation from a king to his subjects. He was a king, and could release himself from any promises he might make. Nothing could restrain him except fear, and the moment the fear was over the restraint was at an end. Happily for English freedom, nobody could help James. His obstinate folly confounded the wisdom of Halifax, as it had paralysed the power of Louis. He left Halifax in the lurch, and that was a thing which mortal man never had the chance of doing twice. The flight of James made Halifax a Williamite, not because it proved William to be victorious, but because it proved James to be a fool. When the peers met for consultation on the 21st of December, they chose Halifax to be their chairman. In the Convention Parliament he was

elected Speaker by the House of Lords, and William made him Lord Privy Seal. He did not long retain either place, and in 1693, two years before his death, he finally retired from official life. He attended the House of Lords to the last, and he signed a protest sgainst renewing the Censorship of the Press. His *Essay on Taxes* and his *Maxims of State* appeared in 1693. In 1694 he wrote, or at least published, his *Rough Draft of a New Model at Sea*. In the last few weeks of his life he drew up his *Cautions Offered for the Consideration of those who are to Choose Members to Serve in the Ensuing Parliament*. He did not live to see the result of the General Election of 1695, which was favourable to the Government, and in which his old enemy John Hampden lost his seat. His final tract, not Number Ninety but Number Six, was written for once on the winning side: the Parliament of 1695 was loyal to the Revolution.

Miss Foxcroft, differing with Macaulay, argues that Halifax retired in 1693 of his own accord, and against the will of the King. I think that she has made out her case, and that Macaulay exaggerated the importance of a hasty exclamation which came from William in Council, that the Marquis could never make up his mind. William was what we mean by a practical politician, and Halifax, with all his shrewdness, was not. But, on the other hand, the King, as became his position, was neither Whig nor Tory, and Halifax proclaimed himself a Trimmer. The great enemy of trimmers was Judge Jefferies, and it was to the fury with which he railed at one of them from the Bench that he owed his recognition in disguise, his capture, and his death in the Tower. The private cause of Halifax's retirement was domestic affliction. The public cause was the ascendancy of the Lord Treasurer Carmarthen. But indeed his

natural place, though he did not know it, was in Opposition.

Some interesting and valuable notes made by Lord Halifax upon the Murder Committee have been preserved, and are now printed in Miss Foxcroft's book. The Committee, which inquired into the judicial murders of William Russell and Algernon Sidney, exonerated Halifax from all blame. But he did not like the attacks made upon him, and he was sick of public affairs. Macaulay says that the one stain upon his career is his correspondence with James through Peter Cook, a Jacobite agent, in 1691. This is an obscure and rather mysterious transaction. From the language in which Halifax speaks of a similar charge, afterwards made against Bishop Sprat by a scoundrel called Young, it may be inferred that he saw no particular harm in making the best of both kings. He thought himself ill-treated by the triumphant Whigs, who suspected him because he would not go the whole way with them, and in the reign of William the Third discontent with the Court of St. James usually meant correspondence with the Court of Saint-Germains. Halifax died seven years before King William, and it was not till the death of Queen Anne that the Jacobites threw away their last chance. The equilibrium of 'little Hooknose's' throne was of the kind which mathematicians call unstable, and Halifax may have contemplated the possibility of James's return under conditions.

The charm of Halifax's character is more easily felt than explained. He was, it must be confessed, rather a selfish man, a refined, well-bred, tolerant voluptuary In a gross age he was without grossness, and he was entirely free, like the Prince of Orange, from the cruelty of which neither Whigs nor Tories can be acquitted.

Consistent he was not. In theory a Republican, making the hereditary principle the subject of merciless ridicule, he procured for himself in rapid succession a Viscounty, an Earldom, and a Marquisate. For a man brought up in the Court of Charles the Second his morals were singularly pure, and he indignantly repelled the charge of Atheism, adding that he did not believe in the existence of Atheists. He seems to have been a sincere Christian, with a contemptuous dislike for dogmatic theology, and a feeling as near hatred as his temper admitted for the Church of Rome. He loved to feel that he had turned a Cistercian Abbey into a comfortable manor house. He liked the Church of England because she trimmed between the excesses of Romanism on one side and the excesses of Puritanism on the other. But he had the strong distaste for clericalism in politics which has been characteristic of the Whig party for the last two hundred years, and of which Sir William Harcourt is to-day the typical impersonation. Halifax himself was hardly a true Whig ; for the Whig and Tory parties were formed by the debates on the Exclusion Bill, when Halifax was the leader of the Tories and Shaftesbury the leader of the Whigs. Yet, while the extreme Whigs always denounced the illustrious Trimmer, and he himself never assumed the Whig name, he was nearer to them than to their opponents. It said, I know not upon what authority, that Mr. Froude's confidential servant, on being asked what his master's politics were, replied, 'When the Liberals are in, Mr. Froude is sometimes a Conservative; when the Conservatives are in, he is always a Liberal.' That was very much the case with Lord Halifax, allowance being made for the fact that the system of party government was then in its infancy. He hated the parade and pomp of power. He was dis-

gusted by ostentation, by vengeance, by triumph, by insolence, by every other quality which the Greeks included in the word ὕβρις. But though he opposed Whig intolerance, he opposed it because it was intolerance, and not because it was Whig. His intellect, as Macaulay says, was always with Milton and Locke. England was to him a republic with an hereditary president, and with all his lukewarmness in politics he loved England from the bottom of his heart. He was not given to enthusiasm, but he was an enthusiastic patriot.

> Our Trimmer is far from idolatry in other things; in one thing only he comes near it—his country is in some degree his idol; he does not worship the sun, because 'tis not peculiar to us, it rambles about the world, and is less kind to us than others; but for the earth of England, though perhaps inferior to that of many places abroad, to him there is Divinity in it, and he would rather die than see a piece of English grass trampled down by a foreign trespasser.

Halifax was not called upon to die for his country, and he would certainly not have died for any political interest. Perhaps he was too well off. He came early into the possession of large estates, and his fortune throughout his life was ample. His public career was one of almost uniform prosperity, for it was not an adverse circumstance to be dismissed by the worst of English kings. He was an affectionate husband, an indulgent father, a sympathetic and generous friend. He was not formed of the stuff which goes to the making of heroes and martyrs. His temper was epicurean, and he enjoyed, as if he had not been a philosopher, what are rather vulgarly called the good things of life. He was habitually considerate of others, and he took care on his death-bed to prevent the knowledge of his condition from putting off the marriage of his son. Like Sophocles, he was gentle in death, as he had been gentle

in life. Even his wit seldom wounded, it was so perfectly urbane.

One cannot think of Halifax without thinking of Burke. Swift, it is true, came between them, and these three may, I suppose, be called the greatest of British pamphleteers. But Burke owed very little to Swift and a great deal to Halifax. Swift, indeed, cannot be imitated. It would be as hopeful to imitate Pindar. His humour is profound; but it is savage, unholy, and unclean. His style is clear, racy, and powerful; but it offers no points for the aspiring essayist. Its perfection is, if not uninteresting, at least uninstructive. Burke had neither the wit of Halifax nor the humour of Swift. He produced his effects by the vastness of his knowledge, the splendour of his eloquence, the energy of his passion, and the loftiness of his tone. Halifax had none of Swift's brutality and none of Burke's magniloquence. He wrote as a highly cultivated man of his day would talk—with more correctness, indeed, but with the same absence of formality and the same dignified ease. He had not Burke's earnestness. If he hated anything except the Church of Rome, he hated a bore. Burke, as we know, emptied the House of Commons, and his pamphlets are very like his speeches. Both are now regarded as standards of classic oratory and storehouses of political wisdom. In his lifetime he had less influence than Halifax, until he hit the temper of the middle class by his diatribes against the French Revolution. Halifax knew exactly what people would read and what they would not. He always amused them, he never wearied them, he did not leave them for a moment in doubt of his meaning. He had the art, essential to a good advocate, of making readers or jurors think that they have arrived at their conclusions for themselves. Burke

lectures and scolds even while he is reasoning with consummate force; Halifax smiles and persuades. 'In such company,' he writes at the end of his famous tract, 'our Trimmer is not ashamed of his name [the 'company' includes the Creator of the Universe], and willingly leaves to the bold champions of either extreme the honour of contending with no less adversaries than nature, religion, liberty, prudence, humanity, and common sense.' Burke was indebted to him for the luminous tranquillity with which in his best days he applied the eternal principles of justice to the passing controversies of the hour. If Halifax had a fault as a controversialist, it was that he indulged with too much freedom in the priceless and permanent luxury of intellectual contempt, which money cannot purchase and custom cannot stale.

The combination of terseness and fulness, of wit and sense, of logic and fancy, are the principal characteristics of Halifax. His works are perfect examples of the hard writing which makes easy reading. No doubt he wrote so that any one should be able to understand him. But he contrived also to excite and to retain the admiration of all who love the English tongue. His most famous tract, the *Character of a Trimmer*, written, but not printed, in the reign of Charles the Second, is a frank and full confession of his own political faith. It is a plea for moderation. Halifax never, so far as I know, mentions Aristotle. It was against his principles to make a display of learning or of anything else, and his classical scholarship was probably superficial. But the *Character of a Trimmer* is the philosophy of the mean teaching by example. It is full of political wisdom, and of condensed thoughts upon which whole treatises might be composed. Take, for instance, the following:

If it be true that the wisest men make the laws, it is as true that the strongest do often interpret them: and as rivers belong as much to the channel wherein they run as to the spring from which they first rise, so the laws depend as much upon the pipes through which they are to pass, as upon the fountain from whence they flow.

Charles the Second's sheriffs and judges might have impressed that truth upon a less susceptible mind than the mind of Halifax. The most infamous of all James's tools, who never had a criminal before him, except perhaps Oates, half so bad as himself, raved with even more than his usual indecency against that 'strange beast called a trimmer.' Many paradoxes are inverted platitudes, and Halifax only stated in plain words the doctrines upon which most men act. It was indignation which made the prose of Halifax, as it had made the verse of Juvenal. When he saw both factions join in giving a bad name to the only men in the country who deserved a good one, he spoke out and struck home. Although he sometimes hesitated in Council, there is no hesitation in his writings. It was in a thoroughly uncompromising spirit that he defended the spirit of compromise. Sometimes he reminds one of Bacon, as in the sentence: 'He that fears God only because there is a Hell, must wish there were no God; and he who fears the King only because he can punish, must wish there were no King.' None, says Bacon, deny the existence of God but those for whom it maketh that there were no God. Halifax agreed with Bacon that Atheism was unthinkable; but he was the reverse of superstitious, and in his *Notes on the Life of Bishop Williams* he says he wants no further evidence against Charles the First's understanding than his Majesty's belief in lucky days. Bacon's two celebrated Essays on Atheism and Superstition sum up the religion of Halifax as of many other contemplative minds. There is a

passage in the *Trimmer* which may be compared with the picturesque simile of a modern orator. Everybody remembers the scathing irony with which Canning compared the Pitt Club to the barbarous worshippers of eclipses. Halifax, in arguing against the Duke of Monmouth's suspected association in the Monarchy, asks the King to 'reflect upon the story of certain men who had set up a statue in honour of the sun, yet in a very little time they turned their backs to the sun and their faces to the statue.'

In his delightful letter to Cotton, the translator of Montaigne, Lord Halifax refers to the great Frenchman's immortal work as the book in the world he is best entertained with. The two cheerful and genial epicureans had indeed much in common. But there was another admirer of Montaigne who seems to have had some influence upon Halifax. The *Provincial Letters* appeared about fifteen years before the *Character of a Trimmer* was written. In the first of these immortal satires Pascal asks whether the five Jansenist propositions condemned by the Sorbonne are really to be found in the writings of Jansen, and gravely observes that mankind have become too sceptical to dispense with the evidence of their eyesight for the existence of visible objects. 'Now,' says Halifax, 'the world is grown saucy and expects reasons, and good ones too, before they give up their own opinions to other men's dictates, though never so magisterially delivered to them.' The grave and temperate irony of Pascal would have exactly suited the taste of Halifax, who shared his hatred of the Jesuits. Pascal was no Protestant, and Halifax was a Protestant to the backbone. But the *Provincial Letters* have always had a singular attraction for the Protestant mind, which assimilates the *Thoughts* with more difficulty. I cannot

help believing that Halifax read and enjoyed the Provincials. He would have specially appreciated the apology for the length of the sixteenth Letter on the ground that Pascal had not time to make it shorter. Halifax aimed always at terseness, and spared no pains to achieve it. 'Ill arguments, being seconded by good armies, carry such a power with them that naked sense is a very unequal adversary.' A prize of some value might safely be offered for a condensation of that sentence.

If some of Halifax's sentences appear to be long, it is because, like most writers of his time, he was careless of punctuation, and used commas indiscriminately with full stops. A more interesting peculiarity is his employment of the old biblical form in the third person singular of the present tense, which even in his time was almost obsolete. I have not attempted in my quotations to preserve his antiquated and rather uncertain spelling. He had no mind for trifles. One of the few things which really moved his indignation was the recklessness of those who, in foreign policy, trusted to the chapter of accidents, 'not considering that fortune is wisdom's creature, and that God Almighty loves to be on the wisest as well as on the strongest side.'

The *Anatomy of an Equivalent* is specially addressed to the Protestant Dissenters, and is an attempt to dissuade them from acting with the Church of Rome against the Church of England. The offer of James was plausible, and if it had come from an honest man it might have been accepted. 'You,' he said in substance to the Nonconformists, 'suffer from the same disabilities as the members of my own Church. The Test Acts are directed against you and us alike. Support me in dispensing Catholics from them, and you shall also be dispensed yourselves.' Halifax could not very well take

the line that the King was not to be trusted. Nor, indeed, were particular and personal arguments suited to the temper of his mind. The 'fineness of speculative thought' was his master passion, and though he lamented that politics were too rough for it, he loved to refine them by means of it whenever he could. Yet the *Anatomy of an Equivalent* is not altogether abstract. There are other ways of indicating people besides their names. Take, for instance, the following passage:

> If men have contrarieties in their way of living not to be reconciled; as if they should pretend infinite zeal for liberty, and at that time be in great favour and employed by those who will not endure it. If they are affectedly singular, and conform to the generality of the world in nothing but in playing the knave. If demonstration is a familiar word with them, most especially when the thing is impossible.

I do not know that Halifax anywhere mentions William Penn; but it is impossible to doubt that this description is meant for him. Of all the agents whom James could have chosen for his purpose, Penn was probably the best. Although he was not at that time regarded as a saint, and had not yet become the eponymous hero of a great Christian community, which was originally called after his father the Admiral, his talents were conspicuous, and his character stood high. He was a courtier, and to be a courtier was not altogether consistent with his religious belief. His defence was that he used his influence with the King on behalf of humanity and religion. If the King's religion was a cruel superstition—if his heart, as Marlborough said, was harder than the chimneypieces at Whitehall—so much the more did one need softening and the other enlightening. Macaulay denounces Penn as a hypocrite and a timeserver. That Macaulay, for some reason or other, detested Quakers is, I think, abundantly clear. Like Dr. Johnson, he never loses an opportunity of

sneering at them. To have dealings with James the Second, and not to be the worse for them, required a stronger man than Penn. It is less likely that he consciously deceived others than that he unconsciously deceived himself. But it is interesting to observe that the estimate of Halifax does not materially differ from the estimate of Macaulay.

As a political philosopher, Halifax stands a head and shoulders above all his contemporaries except Locke. He saw through forms to substance. He perceived the essential realities which the outward trappings of constitutional government conceal from ordinary politicians. In this very treatise, which was on the face of it a pamphlet discussing a question of the hour, he finds space for an analysis of sovereignty which anticipates the rather pretentious work of John Austin:

> There can be no government without a supreme power. That power is not always in the same hands, it is in different shapes and dresses, but still, wherever it is lodged, it must be unlimited. It hath a jurisdiction over everything else, but it cannot have it above itself. Supreme power can no more be limited than infinity can be measured; because it ceases to be the thing; its very being is dissolved when any bounds can be put to it.

The argument is that the power which dispenses can revoke the dispensation, and cannot be controlled by any promise for the future. But it is characteristic of Halifax that he escapes from the actual circumstances of the case into a disquisition upon the nature of power. In his capacious intellect things assumed their true proportions. If he was not—for no man can be—a spectator of all time and all existence, like the ideal philosopher in the *Republic*, he at least looked beyond the controversies of his time to the central truths by which all controversies must in the long run be decided.

Halifax would not have been deceived by the fantastic though convenient theory of the Social

Contract. He pointed out to the Dissenters that a contract was worthless unless one party could enforce it against the other. There may, of course, be contracts which the law will not compel men to discharge, such as bets under the law of England. But the payment of bets is secured by social usage and public opinion not less effectively than if it were secured by law. The Stuarts required a revolution to make them keep their word, and for revolutions Halifax had as strong a dislike as Pym. 'That cannot be called good payment,' he tells the Nonconformists, 'which the party to whom it is due may not receive with ease and safety. It was a king's brother of England who refused to lend the Pope money, for this reason—that he would never take the bond of one upon whom he could not distrain.' A curious inversion of this argument may be found in the Irish politics of the nineteenth century. John Mitchel the Repealer received some support in 'loyal Ulster' because of his advanced views on agrarian reform. In the course of a speech on the land laws he adroitly introduced an attack upon the Union. He was met with cries of 'Down with the Pope!' 'Gentlemen,' said Mitchel, 'I am a Protestant, like yourselves, and I have no more love for the Pope than you. But there is one thing his Holiness cannot do: he cannot issue a writ of ejectment in the county of Antrim.' Halifax, though suspected of lukewarmness by zealots and accused of heresy by the orthodox, was a true Protestant, if ever there had been one, and he gained the ear of the the Dissenters. They had good reason to distrust the King. But Penn might have won them over, if it had not been for the incomparable tracts of the witty and persuasive Marquis. There is no man, save William of Orange himself, to whom the people of England are more indebted for their

freedom. Even now, when two hundred years of parliamentary government have obliterated the memory, and almost removed the meaning, of despotism from the minds of Englishmen, the closing words of the *Anatomy of an Equivalent* make the great struggle of the seventeenth century seem as vivid as the events of yesterday.

> Thus I have ventured to lay down my thoughts on the nature of a bargain and the due circumstances belonging to an equivalent, and will now conclude with this short word. When distrusting may be the cause of provoking anger, and trusting may be the cause of bringing ruin, the choice is too easy to need the being explained.

It is no wonder, as Macaulay says, that Halifax should be the special favourite of historians. He has saved them so much trouble. He has anticipated their verdict, and told them what to think. There is something almost uncanny, and suggestive of the second sight, in the dispassionate judgment which was formed by a civil war and stood the test of a revolution. The 'Constitution of England,' says he in the days of James and Jeffries, 'is too valuable a thing to be ventured upon a compliment.' The sentence is from the *Letter to a Dissenter on the gracious Declaration of Indulgence*. No man hated religious persecution more than Halifax. He hated all persecution. There was neither malice nor resentment in his nature. But he saw that there could be no liberty without law, and that the Test Acts were a smaller evil than the arbitrary power of the Crown. If the King could abrogate a bad Act, he could abrogate a good one, and the Parliament of England would be, like the Parliament of Paris, a machine for the registration of the royal will. This *Letter to a Dissenter* is in every way superior to the other treatise with the same name, which was despatched from the Hague and signed 'T. W.' These initials, which probably stood for 'The Writer,' were supposed at the

time to be an inversion of Sir William Temple's. But the style is the style of Halifax, and therefore altogether beyond the reach of Temple. It contains, moreover, an allusion to Penn which stamps it with the same authorship as the *Anatomy of an Equivalent*. Penn must have had a peculiarly irritating effect upon Halifax, who becomes almost bitter in writing of him. Yet how delicious the irony is!

> The Quakers, from being declared by the Papists not to be Christians, are now made favourites, and taken into their particular protection; they are on a sudden grown the most accomplished men of the kingdom in good breeding, and give thanks with the best grace, in double refined language. So that I should not wonder though a man of that persuasion, in spite of his hat, should be Master of the Ceremonies.

This is a masterpiece of delicate satire; Lord Halifax must have had the picture in his eye when he wrote. 'In spite of his hat' is a perfect touch, given with inimitable skill. The effect is deadly. There is so much insinuated, so little said. An inferior artist would have denounced Penn as a hypocrite, and accused the Catholics of tampering with the most sacred of all truths.

In the year 1695, the last of his life, Halifax wrote a pamphlet on the duties of voters at the forthcoming elections. He called it 'Some Cautions offered to the Consideration of those who are to Choose Members to serve in the ensuing Parliament.' It is marked by all his habitual humour and somewhat more than his wonted cynicism. The franchise was not then considered high, and it underwent no change till 1832. Halifax had no very exalted opinion of the electors, and of the candidates his view seems to have been still lower. 'I doubt,' he says, 'it is not a wrong to the present age to say that a knave's is a less important

calling than it hath been in former times. And to say truth it would be ingratitude in some men to turn honest when they owe all they have to their knavery.' La Rochefoucauld himself never said anything better than that. Of whom was Halifax thinking? Perhaps of John Hampden. Perhaps of Jack Howe. The feeling that it is not fair to choose a life of successful roguery with an easy show of cheap integrity is common enough. But Halifax alone has given it the dignity of a maxim. When Miss Sharp said that it was easy to be virtuous on five thousand a year she expressed the sort of virtue at which Halifax's satire was aimed. He would have said three thousand, we should say seven. But these are contemptible details. There never was a more thorough man of the world than Halifax. Always in it, but always above it, he could judge it from within and from without. One of his judgments upon it was this: 'There is no age of our life which doth not carry arguments with it to humble us: and therefore it would be well for the business of the world if young men would study longer before they went into it, and old men not so long before they went out of it.' Halifax came very young into the world of fashion, pleasure, and business. He did not live to be old. It may have been a consequence of his early apprenticeship to affairs that he survived his illusions so soon. Certainly no man had fewer at fifty, and at sixty he had not one left. Whether his penetrating lucidity made him happier may well be doubted. Naked truth is seldom either decent or pleasant. But that it made him more attractive and entertaining there can be no doubt whatever. Still more cynical, and much less gloomy than this satire upon the lingering veteran who will not quit the stage, is the following reflection upon rumours and reality.

"Common fame is the only liar that deserveth to have some respect still reserved to it; though she telleth many an untruth, she often hits right, and more especially when she speaketh ill of men." It is rather melancholy that this should be Halifax's last word upon human nature and human life. But we must recollect the circumstances in which it was written. He is practically recommending his countrymen at a grave political crisis to be on the safe side. To think too ill of a candidate is less dangerous, though it may also be less Christian, than to think too well of him. But, all the same, it must be feared that Halifax would have agreed with Sir Peter Teazle that it is a bad world (Sir Peter said a particularly bad world), and that the fewer people you praise in it the better.

The 'Rough Draft of a New Model at Sea,' which was written in 1694, is justly celebrated for a famous phrase, such as Halifax knew well how to coin. The success of the New Model on Land had not been altogether agreeable to the young George Savile, who was anything rather than a Cromwellian. But the success was undeniable, and the name stuck. The Dutch navy which sailed up the Medway after the Restoration would have had no chance of performing such an exploit in Cromwell's time, and if any historical origin can be definitely assigned to the British command of the sea, it may be said to date from the Long Parliament. Halifax, who saw most things, perceived with his usual clearness of vision, that England had its root in the sea. 'It may be said now to England,' he wrote 'Martha, Martha, thou art busy about many things, but one thing is necessary to the question, What shall we do to be saved in this world? There is no other answer but this—look to your moat. The first article of an

Englishman's political creed must be that he believeth in the sea, and without that there needed no General Council to pronounce him capable [? incapable] of salvation here.' The moat is, of course, Shakespeare's, and Halifax must have been thinking of—

> This precious stone set in a silver sea,
> Which serves it in the office of a wall,
> Or of a moat, defensive to an house,
> Against the envy of less happier lands.

Nearly two hundred years after the death of Halifax Mr. Gladstone, writing on 'England, France, and Germany' in the *Edinburgh Review*, referred to the 'silver streak' which protected Great Britain from the entanglements of Continental politics. There is no new thing under the sun.

The 'Maxims of State' were not published in the lifetime of Halifax. They appeared for the first time in 1700, five years after his death. They are intensely characteristic, as the communings of a mind with itself must be. There is perhaps a Baconian tinge in them, but they are substantially original. 'Arbitrary power is like most other things that are very hard, they are also very apt to break.' We cannot doubt whose sinister career suggested this maxim. Marlborough, who had good cause to know him, said of James the Second that his heart was as hard as the mantelpiece of Whitehall. Happily for the English people his head, as frequently happens, was a good deal softer than his heart. 'He who thinks his place below him will certainly be below his place,' is a saying which must come home to every student of history, and to every practical politician. The Minister who thinks he ought to be in the Cabinet is always dangerous, unless he is stupid. It has been truly and nobly said of the Duke of Wellington that he

was the greatest man who was ever content to serve. 'A people,' says Halifax 'may let a king fall, yet still remain a people; but if a king let his people slip from him, he is no longer king.' This is perhaps as near to a truism as Halifax ever came. The chief interest of the last maxim lies in its being the quintessence of Whiggery, and the condensation of Burke. It is a thousand pities that Burke, who passed so magnificent a eulogy upon the Savile of his own day, did not bequeath to us the estimate he was so well qualified to form of the man who made the name illustrious. Burke learnt much from Halifax, and he might have learnt much more.

Something must, in conclusion, be said of Lord Halifax's *Advice to a Daughter*. The daughter married the third Lord Chesterfield, who had neither the ability nor the politeness of his son. The marriage, as I have said, was not a happy one. Even the tact and good humour of Halifax were unequal to the task of reconciliation. But the advice was excellent, whatever the results may have been. Halifax was a devoted father, and this letter is composed in his most serious vein. Sometimes his cynical wit breaks out, as when he says that though drunkenness may be an odious vice, a drunken husband is easier to manage than a sober one. But far more often he writes with grave dignity, especially on the subject of religion. The following passage is thoroughly characteristic in its combination of reverence and good sense:

> Take heed of running into that common error of applying God's judgments upon particular occasions. Our weights and measures are not competent to make the distribution either of His mercy or of His justice. He hath thrown a veil over these things, which makes it not only an impertinence, but a kind of sacrilege for us to give sentence in them without His commission.

One thinks of the tower of Siloam. But how few people do! Halifax knew, as well as any man, what the material advantages of this world were worth. He enjoyed them all his life. He was very desirous that his children should have them after his death. No man was less like a morbid recluse, and what he says of money may be trusted. What does he say of it? 'If it was well examined, there is more money given to be laughed at than for any one thing in the world, though the purchasers do not think so.' There is more depth and meaning in that closely packed apophthegm than in Juvenal's trite and obvious tag about the ridiculousness of poverty. Poverty excites the mirth only of those who have no sense of humour. But misapplied wealth has furnished the satirists of all ages with a practically inexhaustible theme. And the beauty of it is that 'the purchasers do not think so.' They never did: they never will. Halifax did not know what it was to be poor. His life was passed in affluence, and much of it in splendour. But his intellect was quite untainted by vulgarity or prejudice. If he had been a country parson, and his daughter had been engaged to the curate, he could not have given her better counsel about economy.

> The word necessary is miserably applied; it disordereth families, and overturneth Governments, by being so abused. Remember that children and fools want everything because they want wit to distinguish; and therefore there is no stronger evidence of a crazy understanding than the making too large a catalogue of things necessary, when in truth there are so very few things that have a right to be placed in it.

There is plenty of social satire in this letter for those who relish it. I feel, for my part, that though it is admirably done, it is too easy for Lord Halifax, too much within the range of inferior minds: 'Vanity maketh a woman tainted with it so top full of herself that she spilleth it upon the company.' The image is droll

enough, but Halifax was capable of better things. As he warms to his subject, and becomes fascinated with his own idea of the vain woman, his style improves, and the end of the description is perfect.

> She is faithful to the fashion, to which not only her opinion, but her senses, are wholly resigned: so obsequious she is to it, that she would be ready to be reconciled even to virtue with all its faults, if she had her dancing master's word that it was practised at Court.

Like all really great humourists, Halifax directed his humour against the follies and vices, never against the virtues and pieties, of mankind.

Such, then, was George, Lord Halifax—Constitutional Revolutionalist, Conservative Republican, pious freethinker, philosophic politician. No finer intellect was devoted in the seventeenth century to the service of the State. Mentally he was above his contemporaries, and in advance of his age. If his moral conviction and his personal enthusiasm had been on a level with his speculative powers, he would have been the greatest man of his time. His temper was too critical, his taste was too fastidious, his wit was too little under restraint, for the rough work of troubled times. His attitude towards the Revolution resembled the attitude of Erasmus, a kindred spirit, towards the Reformation. He understood both the disease and the remedy, but he could not rid himself of the fear that the remedy might be worse than the disease. 'Prosperity,' says Bacon, 'doth best discover vice'; and to the vices of prosperity Halifax was pitilessly severe. He was no worshipper of success. On the contrary, it moved his suspicion and prompted his censure. He could no more live with a party than Burke could live without one. When a number of people began to shout for a thing, Halifax began to ask himself whether it could be so good as it

seemed. As a political pamphleteer he says more in one page than Burke says in twenty, and his style, if less gorgeous, is incomparably purer. We have no specimens of his oratory, but in the House of Lords the fear of all men was lest he should make an end.

Charles the Second, a thoroughly competent judge, considered him the best talker in England. As a writer he is usually wise, often witty, and never dull. His own favourite author was, as he tells us, Montaigne. In his delightful letter to Mr. Cotton, Montaigne's translator, he describes the illustrious Frenchman in terms not inapplicable to himself:

> He let his mind have its full flight, and sheweth by a generous kind of negligence that he did not write for praise, but to give to the world a true picture of himself and of mankind. He scorned affected periods, or to please the mistaken reader with an empty choice of words. He hath no affectation to set himself out, and dependeth wholly upon the natural force of what is his own, and the excellent application of what he borroweth.

It is impossible to read the works of Halifax without being struck by the intellectual affinity between him and the present Prime Minister. The aristocratic temper, the Conservative instincts, the audacious indiscretion, the irrepressible humour, the contempt for the solemn plausibilities of the world, even the epigrammatic turn of the phrases are common to the great Trimmer and the great Unionist. But Lord Salisbury has outgrown the love of minorities which Lord Halifax never lost.

*March*, 1899.

# THE FATHER OF LETTERS

The great edition of Cicero's Correspondence, begun twenty years ago by Professor Tyrrell of Dublin, has at last been completed by Professor Purser and himself. As a monument of acuteness and erudition it is an honour to the scholarship of the United Kingdom, and especially of Ireland. If we do not always find in it the perfect taste which distinguishes all the work of Professor Jebb, also an Irishman, though a transplanted one, we must be grateful for the sound learning, the sympathetic enthusiasm, and the indefatigable industry which have supplied the intelligent reader of these unique letters with all the assistance he wants. Cicero did not, as the schoolboy said of Cæsar's *Commentaries*, write them for beginners in Latin. They are difficult because they are elliptical, because they are familiar, because they were addressed for the most part to men who knew what was in the writer's mind. It was not till the closing years of his life that Cicero began to think about their publication, and he never published them. For my part, I can never forget the sensation of reading as a boy in a crowded railway carriage the confidential note which Cicero tells Atticus that he would not have sent but for his absolute certainty that it would be seen by no other eyes than his. *Habent sua fata libelli.* Except Trajan's celebrated epistle to Pliny, there is now hardly a remnant of all the imperial rescripts in which the rulers of the Roman world expounded their policy and disclosed their

ambition. Of Cicero's familiar correspondence, from the stately treatise on colonial government written for his brother Quintus to the hurried and scarcely coherent scrawl in which he declared, and perhaps rather exaggerated, to his friend Basilus his delight at the death of Cæsar, we have more than eight hundred specimens. Quite apart from their literary excellence, they have more historic value than almost any other relic of antiquity, that antiquity which seems to us so strangely modern. Not even Horace tells one so much about the life of his time, and Horace wrote in the next generation, when the agitated world had settled down into a rather dull and monotonous peace.

Cicero lived through the greatest civil war that has ever disturbed mankind. He took a prominent part in it, not as a soldier, but as a statesman. He was on terms of friendship both with Pompey and with Cæsar. He was never really out of public life from the proud day when he suppressed the conspiracy of Catiline to the dark hour when Octavius turned against the Republic and delivered over the author of the second Philippic to the vengeance of the worthless Antony. The Emperor Augustus has come down to posterity as the patron of literature, the friend of Horace and Virgil and of the 'picturesque historian' Livy. But a dark stain rests upon his memory, which even the rolling waters of time cannot efface. He consented to the death of a man as much superior to himself as the mind is superior to the body. Antony acted after his kind. Shakespeare has put into Antony's mouth, as he put into the mouth of Claudio, some of his noblest verse. But the real Antony was a drunken illiterate boor, whose answer to the eloquence of Cicero was the hired assassin. As Plutarch says with crushing severity, it was not Cicero's hands

and head that the Roman people saw nailed to the platform from which he had so often addressed them, but Antony's soul. Octavius was made of different stuff. He could appreciate men of letters though he was not one, and even in his youth he was a judge of human nature. He understood the value of Cicero and the worthlessness of Antony. His sacrifice of the former was the calculation of cold-blooded selfishness, and if Augustus afterwards became outwardly magnanimous, it was only because he had no longer anything to gain by the meaner vices. He crushed down the recollections of the past, and inaugurated a new era. He had his court poets and his obsequious chronicler. The name of Cicero was never mentioned, and the Republic was ignored. But Cicero could afford to wait. 'Longum illud tempus quum non ero magis me movet quam hoc exiguum.' In these words of dignified and pathetic superiority he appealed from the rancour of faction to the ultimate verdict of the ages and the slow justice of time. He lived, as Tennyson so grandly said of himself, in the distant future. Even in his forensic speeches, as, for example, in the plea for Archias, he often forgot the Prætor, and remembered only the cultivated intellects of all succeeding generations. His philosophic treatises, which he frankly admitted to be no more than paraphrases from the Greek, have perhaps had more influence than they deserve. It is impossible to over-estimate his letters.

It does not matter very much to us whether Cicero took the right or the wrong side of the revolution which ended, eight years after his death, with the battle of Actium. Students of Roman history are apt to be misled by names. When they read that Cæsar tried to upset the Republic, and that Cicero defended it, they jump to

the conclusion that Cæsar was the representative of arbitrary power, and Cicero the champion of popular rights. Then perhaps they read Mommsen, and swing round to the belief that Cæsar was the people's darling who came to deliver them from a corrupt aristocracy, of which Cicero had made himself the tool. If there be a third view of the situation more remote from the truth than these, I am not acquainted with it. Cæsar was an aristocrat of the aristocrats. He cared as little for the people as Louis the Fourteenth, and as little for legal restraints as Napoleon. He was a born ruler of men, and if he had lived to be sixty, he would have died a despot. Cicero was a Conservative Republican, belonging to the middle class, a lawyer by temperament as well as by profession, and as passionate a constitutionalist as Burke. Whether the Republic which he wished to preserve was worth preserving is a question that may be discussed till the crack of doom. It rested upon slavery, and upon exceedingly strict distinctions of class. But nevertheless it opened the highest offices to 'new men' like Cicero; and, in short, he had done very well with it, and he wished it to continue. But by the middle of the century before Christ, the machine had got hopelessly out of gear. Nothing except force could restrain the rabble that had poured from all quarters into Rome, and force was not in the hands of the constituted authorities. So the Republic perished, and with it perished the very little that was mortal of Cicero. He did not live to see Philippi. He left Brutus struggling desperately against overwhelming odds. But whatever we may think about the merits of the war, of its transcendent interest there can be no doubt. The whole future of the world has been affected by the result, and in the letters of Cicero we can trace the events of almost

every day. If the artificial rhetoric of Lucan, who lived a hundred years afterwards, can make the coldest reader thrill over the death of Pompey, it is equally true that the great lyric poet who complimented Cicero and satirised Cæsar while they were all three living would lighten the records of a much duller period than this. There have been many civil wars, but there has been only one Catullus.

History, says Sir Arthur Helps, is spoiled for us by our knowledge of the event. I venture to dispute this proposition. It is the peculiar charm of contemporary documents, like these letters, that we read them knowing what the writer did not know. 'So you think Hirtius and Pansa will get the best of it, do you? How very little foresight you must have, with all your learning.' Probably few of us put it quite so crudely as that. But a feeling of superiority which costs no effort is agreeable to the natural man. Cicero had no reticence. 'I talk to you as I talk to myself,' he says to Atticus, and there can be no doubt that he spoke the truth. He was not sitting for his historical portrait, but pouring out his hopes and fears from day to day. If he has suffered for his frankness in the estimation of German professors, he has won the regard and esteem of every one who can understand the most lovable of characters. Cicero was vain in the sense of liking praise, and showing that he liked it. But from envy he was abolutely free. He was jealous of no man's reputation, and as he advanced in years he became more appreciative of young men, such as Brutus or Octavius. If he could hate, and indulge his powers of invective to the full, as against Catiline and Verres and Antony, it was always on public grounds. His intemperate exuberance over the Ides of March appears to us indecent. But no one in that

age disapproved on principle of political assassination. It was a matter of expediency. Dean Merivale has well said that the measure of our admiration for Cicero is the high standard by which we claim to judge him. we have to remember by an effort that he was not a Christian. He had no personal grudge against Cæsar: they had been on friendly terms, and Cæsar regarded the friendship of Cicero as an honour. They were the two most cultivated and accomplished men of their age. But Cicero honestly believed that Cæsar was a danger to the State, and ought to be removed. His own turn was not long in coming, and he himself was forced to acknowledge that the murder at the foot of Pompey's statue was a useless crime. His letters after the deed are full of laments that, in getting rid of the tyrant, they had not freed themselves from the tyrant's influence. 'We are still governed by the dead man' is their constant refrain. A preacher or a moralist could find no better theme for a discourse on the futility of doing evil that good may come than Cicero's letter after the Ides.

Cicero died before what is called the golden age of Latin literature had well begun. The name of Augustus has imprinted itself upon the generation of Horace and Virgil. The consummate perfection of their literary art has overcome the difference of language and the lapse of years. But the essence of Latinity is to be found not so much in the epic or the lyric poet as in the comedies of Plautus and the letters of Cicero. There are lines of the Eclogues which have been translated, and not always correctly translated, from Theocritus. Horace, as we know, copied Greek odes which are lost. Even Terence, who lived in the great days of the Republic, is believed to have followed Menander word

for word. Cicero, though an excellent Greek scholar, was a Latin purist. In idiom and phraseology he was almost pedantically faultless. He was fond of writing to Atticus about good and bad Latin, about solecisms and admissible varieties of phrase. We have in his latest letters, as Mr. Tyrrell and Mr. Purser put it, 'the high-water mark of Latin prose.' In all of them, late and early, we have racy, idiomatic, almost vernacular Latin. The correspondence of Cicero contains letters from other persons besides himself. There are some from Brutus, of which the authenticity has been doubted, but which modern criticism accepts as genuine. They do not throw a favourable light upon the character of Plutarch's and Shakespeare's hero. They are vain, and tiresome, and shallow. There are a few, too few, extracts from Cæsar's letters, admirable alike in style and substance, the work of a true scholar and a great man. There is the famous and really eloquent epistle in which Sulpicius endeavours to console Cicero for the death of Tullia. Cicero did not even as a letter-writer stand alone. He lived in an age of letter-writers and of highly cultivated men. But just as Shakespeare's greatness appears the more plainly from being contrasted with the other great dramatists of his day, so Cicero shines with the more lustre for having lived among those who could all do well what he could do superbly. If not *primus inter pares*, he was *primus inter magnos*.

When we try to analyse the merits of his letters, we find the difficulty of weighing the impalpable. It is not merely the interest of the subject. Only after the death of Cæsar does the progress of events become really exciting. Many of the most delightful notes to Atticus are on ordinary, even trivial, subjects of the day. It has been well said that the difference between one

person's conversation and another is not what they talk about, but the way in which they talk about it. What is true of conversation is true of correspondence. Just as the most important events seem, when Horace Walpole deals with them, to be trifles, so the most trifling things, when Cicero touches them, appear important. And yet 'important' is not quite the word. 'Attractive' would perhaps be nearer the mark, though no single epithet suffices to express what I mean. Whatever he may be in his philosophical treatises, Cicero in his correspondence is never dull. Nor is he in the least verbose. He is not even Ciceronian, as we usually understand the term. Mr. Tyrrell and his colleague promise a translation. It is much wanted, for the rendering affixed to Middleton's justly celebrated Life leaves much to be desired.* The one fault which I should venture to find with the specimens in the notes to this edition is a too frequent use of slang. Cicero is colloquial enough. But such a sentence as 'The *petit caporal* has had a staggerer' does not give the English reader an idea of what Cicero's playfulness was like. Cicero had no very deep sense of humour, and his formal jests are rather curious than amusing. What he had was an infallible taste and judgment in literary matters. He could play tricks because he knew when to stop. Just as the charm of Shakespeare's heroines, Portia, or Beatrice, or Rosalind, lies in the delicate freedom which is always sure of itself, so Cicero's art, which was a second nature, is most conspicuous when he is apparently letting himself go. It is almost, perhaps quite, impossible for a translator to reproduce

* Since this was written there has appeared the first half of an excellent translation by Mr. Evelyn Shuckburgh, of Emmanuel College, Cambridge.

this quality, and therefore it is safest for him to avoid slang altogether. And indeed there is in these letters a charm far deeper and higher than any grace of manner. Cicero had one of the warmest hearts that ever beat in a human bosom. There never was a better friend. The more his friends were out of his sight, the less they were out of his mind. Vain he was, and egoistical in the measure of his vanity. But of all the Romans we know he was the least selfish. If he loved praise, he gave it. All his geese were swans. Possessing an almost morbidly critical intellect, and moved at times to passionate invective, he always took a sympathetic and indulgent view of the conduct of those he loved. Cruelty he abhorred, and his gratitude was almost excessive.

It is a commonplace that Cicero was the most modern of the ancients. Apart from mechanical inventions, which have no more real influence upon life than soap has upon character, there is very little in our social customs that would have seemed strange to him. What he would have said to the Christian religion we can of course only guess. He would not, we may feel sure, have confounded it with Judaism like Tacitus, or regarded it with distant scorn like Pliny, or ignored it like Plutarch and Marcus Aurelius. He would have examined it with the candour of an enquiring mind, for he could not fail to have been struck by the curious parallel between the moral teaching of Christ and the sublime ethics of his own master Plato. The Platonic Socrates in the *Gorgias* is nearer to the Sermon on the Mount than any other character in literature, ancient or modern, and Plato was Cicero's Bible. Cicero's humanity never slumbered, unless it became, in his opinion, necessary to remove an enemy of the Republic. Although

he accepted, as St. Paul accepted a century after him, the institution of slavery, which has only disappeared from Christendom in our own day, he was the kindest of masters, and his slaves were devoted to him. His views on the treatment of subject races were substantially the same as have been adopted by the best administrators of British India. His statesmanship was high and austere. Lord Melbourne was never tired of quoting that noble sentence 'Mihi semper in animo fuit ut in rostris curiam, in senatu populum defenderem'—It has always been my policy to defend the senate on the platform, and the people in parliament. Considering that representative government was then utterly unknown, and that there were no constituencies to satisfy or to cajole, this is a singularly lofty and dignified profession of faith. The modern tone of Cicero's letters is almost startling. He quotes Greek as we should quote French. He finishes 'in haste' for fear of losing the post, in the shape of his correspondent's messenger or his own. He delighted in the exchange of gossip, social no less than political. Sometimes, not too often, he condescended to 'shop,' and discussed points of law with his learned friends. His disposition was extremely sociable, and in one fascinating letter he enforces the duty of dining out. He dined at much the same time as ourselves, and it was the only meal he cared for. He hated to consume it in solitude. His work was over by the evening, his mind was free, and dinner was the social event of his day. Though strictly temperate, with a horror of drunkenness which even Sir Wilfrid Lawson could not surpass, he liked good wine, and was something of an epicure. Without the sordid avarice of Brutus, he was, it must be admitted, rather too fond of money for a philosopher. But he wanted it

to spend, not to hoard. He lavished it on his library, on his country house, and in a splendid hospitality. Parsimony disgusted him in fact, if not in theory, and the meagre table of Atticus was the subject of expostulations in which he used all the freedom of a friend. He detested the barbarity of gladiatorial games and shows.

His Greek is not the easiest part of his letters. Passionate Platonist though he was, it is by no means Platonic. It was the Greek of his own day, and more like the Greek of the Empire than what we regard as classical. One out of the many words employed by him occurs in the great chapter on charity in the First Epistle to the Corinthians. 'Charity vaunteth not herself,' says St. Paul, *οὐ περπερεύεται*. Cicero did vaunt himself, as he frankly tells us, *ὡς ἐπερπερευσάμην*. The virtue of humility, like the sanctity of marriage, is distinctively Christian, or at least had no place in Ciceronian ethics. Cicero's private life was what we should call eminently respectable. We may repudiate with scorn the infamous libel of Pliny, to which, if I may respectfully say so, Cicero's latest editors pay far more attention than it deserves. It is inconsistent with the whole tone of his letters to Tiro, his favourite slave and freedman, which are fortunately extant. But his idea of marriage, though not perhaps lower than Bacon's, was essentially a low one. He regarded it as a matter of business. We do not know all the causes of his gradual estrangement and final separation from Terentia, though we can see that she was a tiresome and extravagent woman. We do know that immediately after their divorce he married a mere girl who happened to be his ward, and that he married her avowedly for her fortune. Nothing, on the other hand, can be pleasanter than Cicero's

relations with the wife and daughter of Atticus. They are like Gibbon's with Lady Sheffield and Miss Holroyd. But women played a very small part, either for good or for evil, in Cicero's life. From profligacy he shrank, and, feminine in many respects as he was himself, he was too thorough a Roman to believe in the equality of the sexes. He did indeed come into passing contact with the great and too notorious lady who wrecked the life of Catullus. Catullus made Clodia the subject of an invective compared with which Pope's attack on Lady Mary Wortley is tame and cold. Terentia did not like her husband to visit so dangerous a woman, and no wonder. But, though Clodia's husband Metellus was absent from Rome at the time, the object of Cicero's intercourse with her seems to have been entirely political, so that Terentia's jealousy had no foundation in fact. Cicero's correspondence with Cæcilia is unhappily lost. But she was his senior by many years, and their friendship was purely intellectual. The warmth of Cicero's heart went out to his daughter and to his male friends. The death of Tullia broke him down completely. Cold in physical temperament he may have been, but there was no coldness in his personal affections.

With the exception of a few phrases, which are probably corrupt, there is nothing obscure in Cicero's letters. If they are often elliptical, they are never cryptic, and, like all the best correspondence, their style varies with the persons to whom they are addressed. M. Gaston Boissier, in the delightful and really erudite volume which he calls *Cicéron et ses Amis*, compares them with the letters of Madame de Sévigné. The compliment is the highest a Frenchman can bestow, and without it no French eulogy would be complete. It was Sainte-Beuve, I think, who said in a country house on a

wet day 'Lisons tout Madame de Sévigné.' But it would be difficult to imagine two great letter-writers more utterly different. They resemble each other only in the consummate perfection of their literary art. The Roman had always more to say than there was time to say it in, ink to write it with, or wax to scratch it on. The genius of the Frenchwoman lay in writing incomparable descriptions of trifles light as air. Like her country's cooks, she hardly wanted material. She wrote partly, no doubt for the love of her daughter, but chiefly for the pleasure of writing. Her French is, I suppose, though I speak as a fool, on the same unapproachable level as Cicero's Latin. Her style is *tout ce qu'il y a de plus Français*, and even in expressing admiration of it a foreigner feels almost presumptuous. Cicero's correspondence, on the other hand, is sometimes as full of matter as Bacon's Essays. Everything interested him, and his thoughts ran naturally into words. Some may dislike letters with a motive, as some dislike novels with a purpose. But both are popular, or at least both are read. The old-fashioned comparison of Cicero with Pliny had more substance in it, and Dr. Middleton did not fail to draw the moral in favour of Republican Rome. He points out, with his good old English love of freedom, never stronger than in the half-century which preceded the French Revolution, that Pliny had to keep off the forbidden ground of politics, and could only write about his private affairs. Of course, there is the famous letter to Trajan, but that was official. The comparison, however, is unfortunate for Pliny. Even if Latin literature had not been in its decline, his prose would have been as inferior to Cicero's as Addison's to Dryden's.

No reader of Professor Mommsen's brilliant and

learned *History of Rome* can forget the forced tone of artificial scorn in which he always speaks of Cicero. He is especially severe on the Correspondence. 'People,' he says, 'are in the habit of calling it interesting and clever; and it is so, as long as it reflects the urban or villa life of the world of quality; but where the writer is thrown on his own resources, as in exile in Cilicia, and after the battle of Pharsalus, it is stale and empty, as was ever the soul of a feuilletonist banished from his familiar circles.' Prodigious! That Cicero wrote best when he had most to write about must in candour, and can with safety, be acknowledged by his admirers. But that the author of the treatises *On Friendship* and *On Old Age* had 'the soul of a feuilletonist' I deny with none the less confidence because I feel myself imperfectly acquainted with the nature of a feuilletonist's soul. When, however, Dr. Mommsen (in the authorised version of Professor Dickson) calls Cicero 'a journalist in the worst sense of that term,' I begin to feel at home, and I must express my humble gratitude for the most magnificent compliment ever bestowed upon a class more accustomed to kicks than to halfpence. Mommsen is in truth blinded by his idolatrous admiration of Cæsar. Cicero opposed Cæsar and rejoiced at his death. Therefore he had the soul of a feuilletonist, and was 'poor beyond all conception in his ideas.' The Professor triumphantly quotes Cicero's modest deprecation of originality in his philosophic treatises. He only found the words, he says. The ideas were Greek. This may be true enough of the *Tusculans* and the *Offices*. Cicero never meant it, never thought it, and it would be absurdly untrue of the *Catilinarians*, the *Verrines*, or the Correspondence. Professor Mommsen has no sense of measure. With all his accomplishments, and there

is not a more profound scholar in Europe, he lacks that balanced adjustment of intellectual perception upon which the French so justly pride themselves. Imagine a Frenchman saying that Cæsar was 'the entire and perfect man'! As well compare him, like Mr. Froude, with the Founder of the Christian Religion. Thus to be praised confers no honour. It rather excites ridicule. Forgetting that Cicero was a journalist, and a bad one, the judicious historian proceeds to describe him as 'nothing but an advocate, and not a good one.' 'As to Cicero,' he adds, 'every unbiassed person will soon make up his mind.' Bias, or prejudice, is more likely than the want of it to produce hasty conclusions, and if Mommsen is an impartial historian, give me honest partiality. This notion of Cicero as a mere frothy rhetorician who played no practical part in politics, is the most preposterous nonsense to which a great writer ever put his name. It is on a par with the theory, which Mommsen also accepts, that he was a coward. Cicero was for more than twenty years a man of weight and influence in the counsels of Rome. He was not banished for doing too little, but for doing too much. Although he served as a lad in the Marsic war, he was not a soldier, and fighting was not his business. He was not adventurous. He did not court danger, nor expose himself unnecessarily to lawless ruffianism. But he did not shrink from risk in the fulfilment of his duty to the State. In his youth he defended Roscius of Ameria against a prosecution which was really set on foot by Sulla, and Sulla did not stick at trifles. Assassination was a recognised method of political warfare throughout his public career, and his tongue made him hosts of enemies. The second Philippic cost him his life. He published it, though he did not deliver it, and he knew

when he published it that Antony was thirsting for his blood. In 43 B.C., the year of his death, he was at the head of affairs after the Consuls had left the city, and he was then the soul of the resistance to the Cæsarians. He bore his exile badly, no doubt. He loved comfort, and he loved his friends. Livy, in a fragment of his lost books, preserved by Seneca, says that he met no misfortune with dignity, except the last. It is a great exception, and we must remember that Livy was a courtly historian writing for Augustus. None of Cicero's contemporaries made the surprising discoveries reserved for Mommsen. Catullus did not call him a bad advocate, but the best in the world, and the most eloquent of Romans. Juvenal, in that prince of satires which may be called by a pardonable anachronism the Vanity of Human Wishes, points his moral and adorns his tale by contrasting the harmlessness of Cicero's bad poetry with the fatal result of his immortal prose. 'Ridenda poemata malo'—Every one knows the grand old lines. And it is Juvenal, in a less familiar passage, who, looking back a hundred and fifty years and regretting the suppression of the great Republican's name by the short-sighted policy of the earlier Emperors, exclaims, 'Roma patrem patriæ Ciceronem libera dixit.'

It might have struck Professor Mommsen and his school that there was a man, not unconnected with Cicero, of whom everything they say of Cicero is true. Titus Pomponius Atticus, whose name is linked for ever with the name of Marcus Tullius Cicero, did make through meanness the great refusal. He really was a cold-hearted, poor-spirited person, who, observing the perils of public life, resolved to avoid them. A selfish and penurious safety seemed to him better than patriotism and cold steel. 'I like not such grinning honour as Sir

Walter hath: give me life: which if I can save, so; if not, honour comes unlooked for, and there's an end.' It never came to Atticus. He got what he wanted, he saved his skin. After Cicero's death he showed no regard for his memory, it would have been such an unpopular thing to do. He is the man with whom Cicero may profitably be contrasted. Comparing Cicero with Cæsar is like comparing Talleyrand with Napoleon, or Halifax with William the Third. The feeling with which Cæsar himself regarded Cicero was certainly not contempt. On the contrary, the great soldier did all he could to keep the great civilian on his side, and if we may believe Plutarch, he acquitted Ligarius in the teeth of the evidence because he could not resist the eloquence of Cicero. Whether Cæsar was really overcome by the pleadings of this 'bad advocate,' or whether he only pretended to be so that he might keep on good terms with the pleader, is immaterial. For neither hypothesis is reconcilable with the theory that Cicero was of no practical account, and that his public career consisted in 'knocking down walls of pasteboard with a loud din.' Historians should not blind themselves with the passions of a past age. But even that is better than indulgence in excesses of personal abuse from which any sane contemporary would have shrunk. Cicero boasted too much of his public services, and especially of his Consulate. His literary was better than his moral taste, and his vanity sometimes brought him into ridicule. His bitterest enemy, Antony himself, did not suggest that it was all a delusion, that Cicero was a mere phrasemaker, that the work was done by others, while he merely talked. Mommsen denies that Cicero put down the conspiracy of Catiline. But he does not explain why Cicero was banished, and why Catiline's

friends exerted themselves to procure his banishment. 'Rempublicam fovi adolescens, non deseram senex. Contempsi Catilinæ gladios, anne pertimescam tuos?' The words are as familiar as 'Friends, Romans, countrymen.' Where do the Mommsenites suppose that we were all brought up? Cicero wrote and published this passage in the face of the world, and in defiance of Marc Antony. Antony had his head for it, which was no use to anyone except the owner, and earned himself an immortality of shame. Mommsen and Froude would have us believe that the author of the second Philippic was like the fly upon the wheel, imagining that his efforts had raised the dust. There is no credulity like the credulity of malice.

If Cicero's letters were interesting for no other reason, they would be valuable for their originality. The imitative character of Latin literature is commemorated in the well-known precept of Horace that Greek models should be studied by day and by night. Virgil copied successively Theocritus, Hesiod, and Homer. The very names of Horace's metres remind us of his debt to Sappho and Alcæus. Only two of Sappho's odes have come down to us complete, and one of them has been literally translated by Catullus, who translated from Callimachus also. There is reason, as I have said, to believe that the plays of Terence are not paraphrases but literal renderings of Menander, and even Plautus took his plots, if not his language, from the Greek. Cicero himself turned Aratus into Latin hexameters, which are good enough to have been imitated by Lucretius, and his philosophical works are almost entirely derived from Plato. But his letters, though sprinkled with Greek, are emphatically his own, and they show us what the cultivated talk of Roman

society in the last days of the Republic was like. One feature of it is curious. So far as we can see it was neither religious nor irreligious. Cicero was no scoffer. The official religion of the State he passed over in decorous silence. It had ceased even then to be taken seriously by any educated man. But Cicero, though he sometimes used the language of what is now called Agnosticism, was a sincere believer in immortality and in God. As Bayle truly and nobly says, his religion was in his heart, and not in his mind. He could not prove it. He did not want to prove it. He felt it, and if it did not always sustain him under the stress of calamity, it prevented him from sinking into the abysses of materialism. He had the natural faith which springs from a sense of human dignity and moral grandeur.

A letter from Cicero to Atticus on the 7th of March, B.C. 45, 'essentially private,' is the pathetic record of a manly struggle against the burden of almost intolerable suffering. He never quite recovered his daughter's death. But public duty did at last restore him to active interest in political affairs, and his sanguine temperament prevented him from despairing of the Republic until Octavius joined Antony. Then he submitted to the inevitable, but he did not live to see the final overthrow of Roman freedom. He parted, at the turning of the tide, the most illustrious victim of the second Triumvirate. It illustrates the continuity of history and the nothingness of time, that some of Cicero's latest epistles might well have come from a contemporary Frenchman who had heard rumours of a junction between the Duc d'Orléans and General Zurlinden. Editors have taken strange liberties with the text of Cicero's correspondence. In one letter they deliberately inserted the word *non*, and made Cicero say

that he did not struggle with his grief; instead of that he did. By an equally simple and audacious process they caused him, in the most interesting of his literary criticisms, to deny Lucretius either art or genius, instead of crediting him with both. Mr. Tyrrell and Mr. Purser have had the sense and courage to restore the manuscript reading wherever that was possible. Their services as commentators are invaluable. Few scholars have set themselves a more difficult task, and still fewer have more successfully performed it. The treasures which these volumes contain have stood the supreme test. They have defied the centuries. They are proof against all changes of language and religion, because they possess the elements of permanent interest over which all change passes harmlessly as storms pass over the depths of the sea. When Sir Robert Peel was summoned from Rome in 1834 to form a Government, he calculated that he performed the journey in the same time as the Emperor Hadrian. In ten years travelling had been more completely transformed than it was between 1834 and the days of Abraham. But what are mechanical improvements of that sort to the principles of human nature and the motives of human action? There is not an interest or an incident of Cicero's life which does not appeal in some manner to ourselves. He was right to count upon the heritage of immortality for his life and writings. We have it under John Henry Newman's own hand that in style he had but one master, and that the last great Republican of Rome.

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# THE PRINCE OF JOURNALISTS

JOURNALISTS have acquired a habit of talking about each other. Twenty years, or even ten years, ago, they were as little inclined to blow the trumpet of their profession —occupation they would have called it then—as the permanent members of the Civil Service, who, as the late Lord Farrer so admirably said, prefer power to fame. Even their consciousness of one another's infirmities, always perhaps acute, was confined to private conversation. Journalism might have withstood all attacks upon its shrinking modesty but for the establishment of that excellent Society, the Institute of Journalists. One form of self-assertion leads to another, and a presumptuous person ventured last summer to deliver at Oxford, in academic disguise, a lecture on Modern Journalism. In the course of it he expressed the opinion that the greatest journalist who ever lived was Jonathan Swift. As I think he was right on that point, however mistaken he may have been on others, I should like to support and develop the paradox. I use the word paradox in its proper sense of what is contrary to accepted belief, but is nevertheless true. If a paradox be not true, it is mere nonsense.

No one, or scarcely any one, thinks of Swift as connected with the press. As a satirist, as a poet, above all as a humourist, he is of course an English classic. Politicians, if they have read him, know that, in spite of his cloth, he was pre-eminently a statesman. But few of those who admire him the least have gone so far as

to suggest that he was a journalist. Yet he wrote regularly, he wrote anonymously, he wrote on politics, and, if any further proof be needed, he wrote on both sides. He did not indeed write against time. His were days of leisure, not of morning and evening papers. Nor did he write ostensibly for money. But the Deanery of St. Patrick's was a reward for his political services, and may, I suppose, be reckoned as deferred pay. I doubt whether any great writer has put his name to so few productions as Swift. To the day of his death he never would acknowledge the work which prevented him from becoming a Bishop, the *Tale of a Tub*. The most famous of his controversial tracts were ascribed by a transparent fiction to a draper of Dublin. The one essay which appeared with Swift's name upon the title-page was the plea for setting up an English Academy of Letters, which, if it did not lower, has certainly not raised his reputation. The robust common sense of Dr. Johnson, who knew the virtues and the foibles of Englishmen with a perfect knowledge, supplied in a single sentence the epitaph of that proposal. If such an academy were created, he said, most men would be willing, and many men would be proud, to disobey its decrees. With that solitary and perfunctory exception, Swift left his arguments and his illustrations, his invective and his sarcasm, to make their own mark upon the world. That the mark would be deep and ineffaceable, he must have known long before his mind sank into prematurely senile decay. No man was more fully conscious of his own tremendous powers. His genius burst, almost without an effort, the bonds of poverty and obscurity, of an uncontrollable temper and a sullen pride. He trampled on the insufferable patronage of the conventionally great with an arrogance more excessive than their own. He

propitiated no one, he conciliated no one, and when he was doing the work of a Tory Ministry, he insisted upon a deference from Tory Ministers which in that ceremonious age must have seemed even stranger than it would now. After the death of Sir William Temple, upon whom he was dependent, and to whom in his way he was grateful, he called no man master. Indeed he called hardly any man equal. The force which he wielded without fear or pity, without mercy or scruple, was the force of sheer intellectual supremacy. Of his literary friends the only one who could be compared with him was Pope, and Swift came far nearer to Pope in verse than Pope came to Swift in prose. Among the public men with whom he associated there was none except Lord Oxford and Lord Carteret upon whom he did not look down. 'Send us back our boobies,' he exclaimed when Carteret came as Viceroy to Dublin. 'What do we want with men like you?' A characteristic compliment, characteristically worded.

Mr. Lecky has very properly included Swift among the leaders of Irish opinion. Yet there were few things which annoyed him so much as to be called an Irishman. That he was born in Ireland he could not deny. But he was ready with an answer. A man, he said, is not a horse because he was born in a stable. Much of his life, as everybody knows, was spent in Ireland, and the whole Cathedral of St. Patrick's, not otherwise interesting, is overshadowed by the awful inscription engraved by his own desire upon his tomb. The boast which he there somewhat inappropriately makes is a true one.* He

* Hic depositum est corpus
Jonathan Swift, S.T.P.,
Hujus Ecclesiæ Cathedralis
Decani:
Ubi sæva indignatio

did fight manfully and consistently for what he believed to be the liberties of Ireland. But by Ireland he meant Protestant Ireland, and her liberties were bound up for him in a Parliament where no Catholic could sit or be represented. Even upon the Irish House of Commons, when it presumed to touch the rights of the Protestant Church, he turned with a concentrated fury which makes the *Legion Club* almost terrifying to read after the lapse of more than a century and a half. Swift did not regard the Irish Catholics as citizens. He considered them, in Mr. Gladstone's picturesque phrase, to have nothing human about them except the form. In one respect only he was their friend. Despite his parsimonious habits, the indelible result of early indigence, he was generous to the poor. But his political sympathies and his political support were confined to the Protestants and to the Pale. Swift's politics are not, I think, difficult to understand. He was educated by Sir William Temple in loyalty to the Revolution of 1688, and he received some personal kindness from the King. He never became a Jacobite, or a thorough-going supporter of hereditary right. The Whigs did nothing for him after Temple's death, and he had a special grievance

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Ulterius cor lacerare nequit.
Abi Viator,
Et imitare, si poteris,
Strenuum pro virili libertatis vindicem.
Obiit anno (1745)
Mensis Octobris die (19)
Ætatis anno (78).

(Here lies the body of Jonathan Swift, Doctor of Divinity, Dean of this Cathedral Church, where fierce rage can tear the heart no more. Go, traveller, and imitate, if you can, an earnest, manly champion of freedom. He died on the 19th of October, 1745, in the 78th year of his age.)

The dates were of course left blank by Swift. No alteration was made in the epitaph, except to fill them in.

against Lord Somers. But his removal from one party to the other was not the mere consequence of personal disappointment. He had to choose between being a High Churchman and being a Whig. He chose not to be a Whig.

The position of a Whig clergyman has always been difficult. His politics are apt to make him ashamed of his profession. His profession is apt to make him afraid of his politics. The keen intellect and wholesome character of Sydney Smith raised him above shame or fear. He held that the Whig party and the Church of England were co-ordinate and providential instruments for the promotion of human happiness. Swift's intellect was as subtle as it was capacious, as clear as it was profound. But his character was warped and morbid, perverted by some insidious disease which has puzzled all his biographers, and will puzzle them till the end of time. While his logical powers were singularly acute and penetrating, his passions, and especially the passion of hatred, were altogether beyond the control of his will. If he hated the Whigs for not advancing him in the Church, he hated them also for making light of the holy orders which he had chosen to take. He used to say himself that while the Whigs detested the Church, they were mighty civil to parsons, whereas the Tory high-flyers, who exalted the Church above measure, treated the heirs of the apostolic succession as a kind of upper servants. If Swift had been a layman he would probably have remained a Whig. Why he took orders, except that there was no other visible opening for him, it is difficult to say. But having once put on the gown, he remained throughout his life as staunch to the Church of England and of Ireland as ever was soldier to his regiment or politician to

his party. If he had been a student of Shakespeare, which he certainly was not, he might have said with Sir Oliver Martext, 'Not a fantastical fool of them all shall flout me out of my calling.' Sir Walter Scott, in his fascinating *Life of Swift*, which can never be superseded until another man of genius undertakes the task, describes Swift as deeply and sincerely religious. It is presumptuous either to disagree with Sir Walter, or to probe the recesses of the human soul. We cannot follow Swift into his private chapel, or his secret devotions. We can only judge him by his works. There may be religion in the *Tale of a Tub*, though for my part I think that Queen Anne and Voltaire were right when from their different points of view they regarded it as casting ridicule upon all forms of the Christian faith. It certainly did for Swift what *Tristram Shandy* did for Sterne. It cost him his chance of a bishopric. And much as one may be disposed to take the side of brilliant eccentricity against orthodox dulness, it is impossible to say that in these instances the royal objections were unfounded.

The man who can find religion in Swift's sermons must have a microscopic eye. Tried even by the standard of the eighteenth century, they are singularly secular. But perhaps the surest indication of his real creed is given in the striking verses on the Day of Judgment, which were not published till long after his death. They were privately sent by Chesterfield in a letter to Voltaire, but everybody now knows the vigorous lines:

> Ye who in divers sects were shammed,
> And came to see each other damned;
> (For so folks told you, but they knew
> No more of Jove's designs than you).
> The world's mad business now is o'er.
> And Jove resents such pranks no more.
> I to such blockheads set my wit!
> I damn such fools! Go, go, you're bit.

The ingenious critic is at liberty to observe that Jove is an abbreviation of Jupiter, and that Jupiter was a heathen divinity not entitled to the respect of Christians. Such criticism would prove Montaigne to have believed in miracles.

It is of course true that in theological or ecclesiastical controversy Swift always took the orthodox side. He writes as one equally averse from the doctrines of Rome and the doctrines of Geneva. He was as 'sound on the goose' as Parson Thwackum himself. When he said religion he meant the Christian religion; when he said the Christian religion, he meant the Protestant religion; and by the Protestant religion he meant the religion of the Church of England. For the Deists of his time, such as Toland, Asgill, Collins, and Coward, he had a profound and a just contempt. He refers to 'that quality of their voluminous writings which the poverty of the English language compels me to call their style.' In his famous argument upon the inconveniences which would result from the immediate abolition of Christianity by law, he drenches them with vitriolic scorn. But it is all purely intellectual. 'As if Christianity wasn't good enough, and far too good, for such as you,' is the sentiment which underlies the invective. Professor Huxley was not an orthodox Christian. Yet he said that if Bishop Butler were alive, he would put to silence the shallow infidelity of the day. Swift showed no indignation against Bolingbroke, who was a notorious sceptic, nor against Pope, who was certainly not a Protestant, and was a Catholic only in name. It is the material property, not the spiritual influence of the Church, for which he was most eager to fight. His clear strong mind was fretted by the pretentious cleverness of men who acquired a spurious reputation for wit

and learning by their attacks upon established beliefs. If that is religion, then Swift was religious. But so far as religion is contained in the Sermon on the Mount, or the thirteenth chapter of the first epistle to the Corinthians, Swift had no more of it than Bolingbroke, and a good deal less than Voltaire. He had the honesty to keep every vestige of it out of his own epitaph on himself.

Swift was by far the greatest writer who ever devoted himself to the service of the Tory party. Johnson's political pamphlets are worthless compared with Swift's, and when Burke thundered against the French Revolution he spoke for a large number of Whigs. Although I should not myself rate *The Conduct of the Allies* so high as *The Anatomy of an Equivalent*, or *Thoughts on the Causes of the Present Discontents*, I know of no other English pamphleteer who could be put on a level with Halifax, Swift, and Burke. But whereas Halifax was for years what we should call a Cabinet Minister, and Burke the greatest orator in the House of Commons, Swift was disqualified from even entering Parliament. Nor was he really trusted by the Ministers whom he served. As Mr. Morley says, he was the dupe of his great friends. They called him Jonathan; they treated him with every external mark of confidence and attention. If they had not, he would have turned upon them with the utmost ferocity. But they did not tell him that they were Jacobites at heart, and in communication with the King over the water. It was not special knowledge that gave Swift the mastery, but the fact that he had a statesman's mind. Macaulay has written in the margin of the letter to the October Club that a man must have been behind the scenes in politics to understand the excellence of this pamphlet. It might, he said, have been written in defence of the

Whig Government from 1835 to 1841. It might, I add, have been an apology for the Liberal Government from 1892 to 1895. It is the old dilatory plea against expecting everything at once, wanting the millennium, as Mr. Anthony Hope says, in a Pickford van, but expressed with a plausible and persuasive subtlety that takes in almost everyone, except the author. Yet even then, when his object was to conciliate the country and allay dissatisfaction with Lord Oxford, Swift could not refrain from irony. Eminent statesmen, he remarked, had sometimes told him that politics were only common sense. It was the one thing they told him that was true, and the one thing they wished him not to believe. More delicate, and not less deadly, is the account of the Minister who, because he can judge better than the public when he knows more than they, thinks that he must be wiser than the rest of the world when their information is the same as his own. In practical sagacity Swift may be compared with the favourite object of his aversion, Sir Robert Walpole. He had one of those intellects which no sophistry can delude, and which are incapable of deviating from the path of reason. When the nation was mad over the South Sea Bubble, Swift, in a few simple stanzas, exposed the whole fabric of deception in a manner intelligible to a child.

What they do in heaven, said Swift, we know not; what they do not we know. They neither marry, nor are given in marriage. *Chatter about Harriet* was the late Professor Freeman's epigrammatic summary of recent literature on Shelley. There is nothing new to be said about the relations between Swift and Stella. Sir Henry Craik, in his exhaustive biography, has collected the evidence in favour of the marriage. Mr. Churton Collins has argued with great ability the

negative case. Every detail of Swift's career is interesting. But as the alleged marriage was a nominal, and not a real one, it is possible to exaggerate the importance of this particular incident. Upon the general subject of Swift's conduct to women Sir Walter Scott has said the last, or the last profitable, word. With exquisite delicacy, and with true insight, he has shown that Swift's passions were of another kind, and that he was incapable of falling in love. Unfortunately he could inspire feelings which he could not return. But that is a subject which Thackeray has made his own for ever. It is, of course, to Swift's friendship for Stella, whatever its precise nature may have been, that we owe the celebrated *Journal*, with its 'baby language,' its unflinching revelation of character, and its great historical value. I cannot see the tenderness which some have found or thought they found in it. It was written at the happiest, or least unhappy, period of his life, and yet it is full of gloomy pride, of obstinate isolation, of implacable revenge. For acute observation of men and manners, for lurid insight into hidden motives, for a haughtiness of temper which no despot could have surpassed, it is singular in the documents of autobiography. It was Swift's curse that nothing mean or vile or low or nasty ever escaped the pitiless keenness of his penetrating eye. He employed his unrivalled powers of ridicule and invective on the side of religion and virtue, but of decency he did not know the meaning. Even the 'troughs of Zolaism' contain nothing fouler than some of Swift's so-called poems. These are only fit to be burned by the common hangman, and it is wonderful that they should have been preserved. Some of his best and gravest work contains expressions from which most laymen would

have shrunk, and of which any clergyman should have been ashamed. But Swift was ashamed of nothing. He was exempt from moral and apparently even from physical nausea. No idea was too disgusting for his imagination, no image too loathsome for his pen. The *Journal to Stella* owes, I cannot help thinking, some of its charm to its freedom from this disfiguring grossness. For this must be said of Swift, whether it be against him or in his favour, he neither conceals what is repulsive nor varnishes what is foul. Filthy he often is, prurient never. He cannot have made vice attractive to man or woman.

He was, in sober truth and earnest, a real cynic and misanthrope. Born with a temper which was a greater misfortune than any corporal defect, he nursed and cherished the *sæva indignatio* of which he boasts on his tomb until it subdued his will, overpowered his reason, and left him to expire a driveller and a show. He is the only great writer who did actually hate his fellow-men. The ordinary characteristics of human nature were to him odious in themselves. And when they appeared most fair, his terrible fancy transformed them. He could not see a beautiful woman without fancying how coarse her skin would look under a microscope. *Gulliver's Travels* has been called a political satire. It is a satire and a libel on humanity. More and more savage does the author grow with the progress of his work, until in the last part he is like the demoniac raging among the tombs. Critics have praised the verisimilitude of *Gulliver*, and told the story of the Irish Bishop who said he did not believe a word of it. There is a humourous exactness of detail in the wildest extravagances of the fiction, no doubt. But Swift had not the peculiar gift of Defoe. He does not inspire belief

in everything he says, like that most imaginative and unscrupulous of romancers. To do so a man must have his prejudices and passions under control. Swift could govern himself well enough when he was writing on politics or upon any abstract question. It is in dealing with mankind that his fury carries him away.

Only such an intellect could have been proof so long against such a temper. Only such a temper could in the end have ruined such an intellect. It was said of a former Speaker that he always flew into a passion in Parliamentary English. Swift's irritability, to use a mild word, did no injury to his style. Of Swift's prose it seems to me almost impossible to speak too highly. It has not the splendour of Milton's, or Dryden's, or Burke's. But as a method of conveying thought it is perfect. Nothing once said by Swift could ever be said again without being spoiled in the saying. Absolute and utter simplicity is the distinguishing mark of his style. No doubt this simplicity is a highly artificial product. It is the result of pruning, of trimming, of cutting down. The result and the object of these processes is to leave the reader face to face with the precise idea which the writer wished to convey. There is no veil, however thin, between the mind of the author and the mind of the public. Clearness and force could not be more harmoniously combined. Swift's reasoning faculty, when he used it at all, worked with consummate accuracy and without the slightest friction. There were very few things he could not understand, and whatever he could understand he could explain to the humblest capacity. His mind supplied him with an endless succession of ludicrous images, but he used them only when they assisted the point he wished to drive home. Tricks and mannerisms he discarded and abhorred.

After the lapse of nearly two hundred years his best work shows little or no trace of obsolete phrases and idioms. It was the choicest English then, it is the choicest English now. The *Drapier's Letters* deal with the coinage of Wood's halfpence. Nobody except an historical student cares any longer for Wood, and the copper coins he introduced into Ireland under contract with the Government. But the *Drapier's Letters* can be read with delight by all who enjoy masculine reasoning, simple eloquence, and racy humour.

Swift's prose masterpiece is now, I think, commonly admitted to be the *Argument against the Abolition of Christianity*. The *Mechanical Operation of the Spirit* is almost equal to it. The *Drapier's Letters* are as much superior to Junius as Junius is superior to Wilkes. The Dean's own judgment upon the *Tale of a Tub* is well known. 'What a genius I had when I wrote that book!' he said in his clouded and declining years. The *Tale of a Tub* has passed beyond criticism and become a standard of satirical excellence. It is from no affectation of singularity that I prefer the later produce of that 'savage and unholy genius' to this early effort. There is genius in the *Tale*, of course. Swift was right in that. It is an exuberant genius, bursting all bounds of taste and congruity, with all Voltaire's license and none of Voltaire's tact. As one grows older one comes back to Horace:

Est modus in rebus, sunt certi denique fines.

With all Swift's admiration for *The Tale of a Tub*, he did not repeat the experiment. He had, in a literary sense, sown his wild oats. He began to curb not his irony, but his fancy, and the soberer he grew the more deadly he became. Under the frown or smile of that irony everything pretentious shrivelled up and dis-

appeared. The Dean detested hypocrisy so bitterly that he railed even against ordinary devotion. The tears of a widow weeping for her husband were to him a cloak for her wish to find another. He could not believe in purity of motive or unselfishness of aim. Yet he was not without virtues of his own. He gave away money to the needy, though no professional miser loved money more. He risked the loss of his own liberty in order to fight, if not for the liberties of Irishmen, at least for the liberties of Ireland. His patriotism was genuine and incorruptible. If he sometimes trampled on the weak, he never stooped to flatter the strong. Although his early opinions were liberal, there is no reason to doubt the sincerity of his later Toryism. The truth is that as Burke bowed down and worshipped the British Constitution, so Swift bent the knee to the Established Church. Both may have been wrong, but one was as honest as the other.

Swift taught by example, and not by precept. It may be doubted whether he had any theories of style. He was a sound classical scholar, though, like most men of his time, especially Pope and Addison, he studied Latin rather than Greek. Ignorance of the Greek language accounts for Sir William Temple's belief that the *The Letters of Phalaris* were genuine, and Bentley's monumental treatise was out of Swift's depth altogether. But he knew Horace and Virgil a good deal better than he knew Shakespeare or Milton. He had the classical standard of taste, with a rooted dislike of anything tawdry, showy, or 'flash.' His criticisms on Bishop Burnet exhibit an equal abhorrence of the Bishop's politics, which were Whiggery of the purest water, and the Bishop's English, which was anything but pure. He was the master, not the servant, of language, and he

could always make it do exactly what he wanted. For slovenly writing, as for slovenly knowledge, he had an irrepressible contempt.

> The most accomplished way [he says in the *Tale of a Tub*] of using books at present is two-fold: either, first, as some men do Lords, learn their titles exactly, and then brag of their acquaintance. Or secondly, which is indeed the choicer, the profounder and politer method, to get a thorough insight into the index, by which the whole book is governed and turned, like fishes by the tail. For to enter the palace of learning by the great gate requires an expense of time and forms. Therefore men of much taste and little ceremony are content to get in by the back door.

One is reminded of the well-known couplet:

> For index-learning turns no student pale,
> Yet holds the eel of science by the tail.

'As some men do Lords' cannot, I suppose, be grammatically defended. Like other masters of English, such as Newman and Froude in our own day, Swift is occasionally careless of minute accuracy, and his dullest editors have an obvious satisfaction in pointing out these trivial defects. A mistake showing real ignorance is not to be found in Swift.

It was from the *Battle of the Books*, not one of Swift's happiest efforts, that Matthew Arnold took one of his most successful and popular phrases. The *Battle of the Books* is, we may be thankful to reflect all that remains of the foolish controversy over the rival merits of ancient and modern literature. The disputants might as profitably have employed themselves in comparing the relative excellence of Virgil and Dryden, or of Homer and Pope. Swift, in gratitude to Temple, who oddly took the side of authors he could not read, came forward as their champion.

> As for us, the ancients [he wrote], we are content with the bee to pretend to nothing of our own beyond our wings and our voice; that is to say, our flights and our language. For the rest, whatever we have got, has been by infinite labour and search, and ranging through every

corner of nature. The difference is that instead of dirt and poison we have rather chose to fill our hives with honey and wax, thus furnishing mankind with the two noblest things, which are sweetness and light.

There is an imaginative beauty in this passage to which Swift seldom attains. His habitual vein was irony, which came as surely and as naturally to him as the rhymed couplet came to Pope. There is scarcely a better specimen of this, his favourite weapon, to be found in all his works than the final sentences of the strange and sinister *Argument*, to which I have so often referred. He had already asked what young men of wit and fashion would have for the object of their raillery if the Christian religion were abolished; how Freethinkers could gain a reputation for learning; and what could hinder Popery from being put in the place of religion. Then comes the climax:—

To conclude, whatever some may think of the great advantage to trade by this favourite scheme, I do very much apprehend that in six months time after the Act is passed for the extirpation of the Gospel the Bank and East India Stock may fall at least 1 per cent. And since that is fifty times more than ever the wisdom of our age thought fit to venture for the preservation of Christianity, there is no reason why we should be at so great a loss merely for the sake of destroying it.

That seems to me finer than anything in Voltaire. Voltaire always appears to be conscious of his own cleverness, to be showing what he can do. Very wonderful his performances are. But in Swift's best work, this *Argument* for example, the strokes descend upon the victims with the grim, relentless force of circumstance or fate. It is not so much Swift as the naked truth of things, stripped of all subterfuge and disguise, speaking through Swift's mouth, while upon Swift's face there is never the flicker of a smile.

In his *Thoughts on Various Subjects* Swift displays a lighter and, if such a word may be used of such a man, a more genial mood. The sarcasm is there, as indeed it

is everywhere. But it is of a less cruel and more human sort. 'The reason why so few marriages are happy is because young ladies spend their time in making nets, not in making cages.' For exquisite felicity of diction that little apophthegm is unapproached and unapproachable. Like all the best verbal wit, it is not merely verbal. It is worth, to my mind, half a dozen essays from the *Spectator*. Somewhat grimmer is the following:—

> Venus, a beautiful, good-natured lady, was the goddess of love; Juno, a terrible shrew, the goddess of marriage; and they were always mortal enemies.

But, after all, this was the last subject on which Swift could pose as an authority. Here is a judgment more in his line:—

> As universal a practice as lying is, and as easy a one as it seems, I do not remember to have heard three good lies in all my conversation, even from those who were most celebrated in that faculty.

From the friend of Pope this is much. But we could wish that the Dean had given us the two.

> True genuine dulness moved his pity,
> Unless it offered to be witty.

So wrote Swift with truth and sincerity, in the most celebrated of all his poems. The Dean's most shining merit was his hatred of cant. Carlyle attacked the cant of philanthropy, forgetting that there was a cant of misanthropy as well, and that malevolence may be quite as sentimental as its opposite. But Swift detested shams in general, not merely the shams obnoxious to himself in particular. His loathing of his own kind was not affectation. It was an awful reality. In more wholesome ways, and from more manly motives, he despised from the bottom of his soul all who pretended to gifts or virtues which they did not possess. Intellectual contempt was at the root of his animosity against superficial deism and against the false wit which would amuse no

one if it were not profane. His *Letter to a Young Clergyman* shows that he applied the same principle with strict impartiality to those of his own cloth. Swift indeed felt for the clergy as Johnson felt for Garrick. He would not suffer any one else to criticise them without rushing to their defence, and yet no one criticised them more severely than himself. His advice to this young man might have been read and pondered with advantage by the contemporary school of divines, whose sermons Archbishop Tait once described as like essays from the *Spectator* without the Addisonian elegance.

> I cannot forbear warning you in the most earnest manner against endeavouring at wit in your sermons, because by the strictest computation it is very near a million to one that you have none; and because too many of your calling have made themselves everlastingly ridiculous by attempting it. I remember several young men in the town who could never leave the pulpit under half a dozen conceits; and the faculty adhered to those gentlemen a longer or shorter time, exactly in proportion to their several degrees of dulness. Accordingly I am told that some of them retain it to this day. I heartily wish the brood was at an end.

About Swift's own sermons there is some uncertainty. There are not many of them extant, and it is doubtful whether they were preached. The religious or spiritual element is as conspicuously absent from most of them as it is from Sterne's. With all his staunch Protestantism, and his not less resolute High Churchmanship, in which may be traced a curious resemblance between him and Archbishop Laud, Swift could be coarser than Rabelais, and profaner than Voltaire. Men have been convicted and imprisoned in this country for treating sacred subjects less offensively than Swift treats the Holy Communion in the *Tale of a Tub*. The only distinction which could have been drawn by the most ingenious counsel for the defence is that the ostensible object of Swift's satire was not the Christian religion, but the Church of Rome, and the essence of blasphemy is not so

much its objects as the methods by which those objects are attempted or achieved. The following passage from Swift's sermon on the fate of Eutychus, though it may be unsuitable to the pulpit, is not unfit for publication, and is certainly neither 'conceited' nor dull :—

> The accident which happened to this young man in the text hath not been sufficient to discourage his successors; but because the preachers now in the world, however they may exceed St. Paul in the art of setting men to sleep, do extremely fall short of him in the working of miracles, therefore men are become so cautious as to choose more safe and convenient stations and postures for taking their repose without hazard of their persons; and upon the whole matter choose rather to entrust their destruction to a miracle than their safety.

That has all the best qualities of Swift's humour without any of the faults which sometimes disfigure it. The ideas are intensely ludicrous, and the images by which they are conveyed excessively comical. And yet there is all the appearance of grave reasoning, of flawless logic, and of an obvious reflection which almost apologises for being a platitude. The little phrase 'upon the whole matter' is inserted with admirable artifice. It suggests the imperturbable demeanour of a dignified judge, calmly weighing the reasons on both sides, and concluding that it were better to sit in church upon a bench from which there was no possibility of falling.

Swift was not only a statesman and a satirist. He was also the father of what is now called Society Verse. It is curious that before he hit upon the form which best suited him, and in which the inimitable stanzas on his own death were composed, he should have perpetrated some of those crazy Pindarics which were fashionable when he was young. The 'Odes' to Archbishop Sancroft and to Sir William Temple, particularly the letter, are not to be matched for badness among the worst imitations of Cowley. It was a strange theory that because Pindar wrote Greek poetry of the highest

excellence in a rather difficult and complicated metre, therefore English poetry could be written in no metre at all. Fortunately the error came to a speedy and ignominious death at the hands of Swift himself. Well might Dryden, who died in 1700, say, 'Cousin Swift, you will never be a poet.' Swift could not forgive the insult, and he says, in the *Tale of a Tub*, with a malignity which for once was stupid, that Dryden would never have been taken for a great poet if he had not in his own Prefaces so often made the assertion. But he profited by the condemnation, and wrote no more Pindarics. In 1698 he produced the first of the poems, if poems they are to be termed, which will be read with pleasure and copied with freedom so long as English verse remains a vehicle of thought. I mean the famous lines, *Written in a Lady's Ivory Table-Book.*

> Here you may read, 'Dear charming saint;'
> Beneath, 'A new receipt for paint;'
> Here, in beau spelling, 'Tru tel deth,'
> There, in her own, 'For an el breth;'
> Here, 'Lovely nymph pronounce my doom!'
> There, 'A safe way to use perfume;'
> Here, a page filled with billet-doux;
> On t'other side, 'Laid out for shoes;'
> 'Madam, I die without your grace,'
> 'Item, for half a yard of lace.'

Two years afterwards, when chaplain to Lord Berkeley in Ireland, Swift wrote *Mrs. Harris's Petition*, which as a bit of low comedy is unsurpassed in literature. Has Dryden's prophecy been fulfilled? That depends upon the definition of poetry, which has never yet been and perhaps never will be, authoritatively defined. But those who deny the title of poet to Swift must deny it also to Pope. They stand and fall together. Pope was Swift's avowed model. He never, he said, could read a line of Pope's without wishing it were his own. Is there such a thing as the poetry of common sense? Horace thought

there was, and by his judgment I am content to abide. Swift, like Pope, creeps on the ground. He does not strike the stars. He has no height of imagination, no depth of passion, and, even in his verses to Stella, no store of tenderness. Few lines of his are more characteristic than his playful exposure of the South Sea Bubble :—

A shilling in the bath you fling ;
The silver takes a nobler hue
By magic virtue in the spring,
And seems a guinea to your view.
But as a guinea will not pass
At market for a farthing more,
Shown through a multiplying glass,
Than what it always did before,
So cast it in the Southern Seas,
And view it through a Jobber's Bill,
Put on what spectacles you please,
Your guinea's but a guinea still.

This is quite conclusive, and entirely prosaic. Swift became with practice a perfect master of form in verse, and the lines on his own death are flawless from beginning to end. In this respect he far excelled his contemporary Prior, and has not been outdone by his successor Praed. Cowper was his admiring student, and Johnson's birthday odes to Mrs. Thrale were modelled on Swift's to Stella. The consummate mastery which Swift gradually obtained over his instrument, and the perfect ease with which he wielded it, are perhaps the secret of its permanent charm. The satiric humour, which in his prose is apt to be savage, and in the *Legion Club* is ferocious, is mellowed and chastened with social playfulness in *Cadenus and Vanessa*, or *Baucis and Philemon*.

As Rochefoucauld from nature drew
His maxims, I believe them true ;
They argue no corrupted mind
In him, the fault is in mankind.

Swift's estimate of the illustrious Frenchman is sound and just. The cynicism of La Rochefoucauld was the cynicism of an outraged sentimentalist. He expected too much of men and women. Because they were not angels, because their lives did not square with their theories, he believed the mass of them to be utterly base. But he always recognised that there was a noble remnant. He stopped far short of Swift's universal misanthropy. *Il y a peu d'honnêtes femmes*, he says, in the bitterest of all his maxims, *qui ne soient lasses de leur métier*. There were a few, and to La Rochefoucauld it was the minority that made the world fit for human habitation. It was not a high standard of morals, nor a small capacity for belief, that drove Swift into cursing and railing. It was constitutional distemper and dispair. If Archbishop King knew the secret of the Dean's misery, he kept it like a gentleman and carried it to the grave. The death of Stella, as Thackeray says, extinguished his last ray of hope, and almost his last gleam of reason. 'After that, darkness and utter night fell upon him.' If one cannot truly say 'What a noble mind was here o'erthrown,' one may at least feel that a gigantic intellect sank suddenly into the abyss. There was no warning. Until Swift became a lunatic, his mind cut like a diamond through the hardest substances in its way. No sophistry ever deceived him. No difficulty ever puzzled him. There was nothing he thought which he could not express. The pellucid simplicity of his style, both in prose and in verse, came of clear thinking and sound reasoning, assisted by the habit of daily explanation to unlettered women. It is easy to understand him, because he understood so easily himself. A great deal of time is wasted by the 'general reader,' in guessing at the meaning of authors

who did not mean anything in particular. Uncertainty is the fruitful parent of obscurity, and many people write obscurely in the hope that they will be thought profound. Like the subaltern who would not form his letters distinctly lest his correspondents should find out how he spelt, there is a class of writers who will not be plain lest the poverty of their thoughts should be exposed. Swift, it must in fairness be admitted, did not treat of questions which transcend the powers of human language. His prose is never metaphorical, and his poetry could always be translated into prose. He had what the French call an *esprit positif*. Philosophical speculation did not attract him, and if he inwardly cultivated any religoius mysticism, he kept it entirely to himself. Eloquent he was not. He seldom rises and seldom falls. What made him the prince of journalists was his mental tact. He had the public ear. He knew precisely when the anvil was hot, and where he ought to strike it. To say that he never took a bad point would be to exaggerate, though there are not many controversialists who took so few. When he turned Bishop Burnet's fears of a Jacobite restoration into ridicule, he merely showed that the worthy Bishop knew the danger, and that he did not. That any one should ever have thought Harley a greater minister than Walpole seems incomprehensible to us, and though it may have been true friendship, it was false judgment. But Swift's particulaar errors are quite unimportant now. His value to posterity lies in his matchless humour, his statesmanlike wisdom, his hatred of pretence and sham, his intellectual integrity, and above all the sustained perfection of his English style.

*January*, 1900.

# MACAULAY AND HIS CRITICS

Macaulay was born on the 25th October, 1800. His hundredth birthday fell, therefore, during the last year of the nineteenth century. Some of his contemporaries—Mr. Charles Villiers, for instance, and Cardinal Newman—are familiar personages to the present, even to the rising generation. Macaulay has been in his grave more than forty years, during which his fame and popularity, sometimes greater, sometimes less, have never been for a moment obscured. Fifteen years after his death appeared Sir George Trevelyan's classical biography, which by general consent ranks with Boswell's "Life of Johnson" and Lockhart's "Life of Scott." That book for the first time revealed Macaulay as a man to the public who had only known him as a writer, and in doing so made for him a new circle of admirers. Upon the virtues of his private life there cannot be two opinions. There never lived a more dutiful son, a more affectionate brother, or a more faithful friend. Nor has any one impugned the honourable integrity of his political career. In early life he was a vehement partisan, unable or unwilling to see the merits of Sir Robert Peel and the faults of Lord Grey. After his return from India his politics, like his conversation, became less violent, and though he always continued to call himself a Whig, he died something very like a Conservative. But for such change as he underwent malice itself could suggest no sinister motive, and he lost his seat in Edinburgh because, though the staunchest of Protestants, he

thought it just to vote for the endowment of a Catholic college. It is not, however, as a politician or as a patriot that Macaulay will be remembered. His sturdy patriotism may excuse his pride in having been born on the anniversary of Agincourt. But if he had been merely an eloquent speaker, a brilliant talker, or, as Sydney Smith less kindly called him, a book in breeches, his name would already have been more than half forgotten. It is as an author, and, above all, as an historian, that he belongs to the permanent heritage of mankind.

We have to judge Macaulay by a colossal fragment. He died, so to speak, with his pen in his hand. The History which was to have embraced the long reign of George III. breaks off at the Peace of Ryswick. The real addition to it is not the death of James, nor the death of William, which have little value without their context, but the admirable life of Pitt which he contributed to the *Encyclopædia Britannica.* This was the last of his completed writings, and in all his life he never wrote anything better. His History could not have been finished by any one of less vitality than Methuselah, if the original design had been pursued on a uniform scale. Four large octavo volumes do not suffice for the events of seventeen years. But it is fair to assume that the critical periods which immediately preceded and immediately followed the Revolution of 1688 were described at a length and with a fulness which would not have been thought necessary throughout the work. That Macaulay had a good eye for proportion is proved by his introductory chapter, of which the late Professor Freeman declared that no better summary of English history had been or could be composed. Its accuracy he pronounced to be marvellous, and Freeman,

whatever else he may or may not have been, was at least profoundly learned. But the notion that Macaulay was shallow or superficial may be said to have died with Croker, or at least with Cotter Morison. His classical scholarship was conspicuous in a classical age. His knowledge of history was steadily accumulated almost from the cradle, and it was his own astounding precocity which led him into the use, perhaps the abuse, of the famous phrase, 'Every schoolboy knows.' How much Macaulay read for the actual purpose of his great book we cannot with absolute certainty tell. He does not cite all, or anything like all, his authorities, and that fact has led his critics into many a trap. Some historical manuscripts which would have been invaluable to him have been discovered since his day, in country houses and elsewhere. But we may feel pretty sure that whatever was available to him, inside and outside the British Museum, of which he was a Trustee, he read, from the gravest documents of State to the most trivial ballads and broadsheets which had by accident been preserved.

No historian, not even Gibbon, went through a more conscientious training than Macaulay. Singularly powerful and retentive as his memory was, he verified references with the most punctilious care. There were, no doubt, some fields of knowledge, and more fields of speculation, which he never penetrated, and did not care to penetrate. Natural science was closed to him. He lost the Chancellor's Medal at Cambridge by failing in elementary mathematics, and though he manipulated the figures of the Army Estimates with success as Secretary at War, he never took up any scientific pursuit, unless political economy be regarded as a science. With metaphysics he did not

meddle. He was once induced to read an English translation of Kant, and confessed that the only thing in it he could understand was a Latin quotation from Persius. Theology interested him only so far as it bore upon practical politics. But he had not been brought up in the Clapham sect for nothing. He knew the Bible as well as his more pious father, and he was thoroughly acquainted with the distinctive tenets of every sect in England. To an English historian such knowledge is essential, and Macaulay possessed it in an eminent degree. He had none of Gibbon's prejudice against Christianity. His own religious opinions he kept to himself, except on the memorable occasion at Leeds when he proclaimed himself a Christian. He probably held that religion is meant to guide conduct and not to flavour conversation. But as a historian he entered fully, and even sympathetically, into the minds and views of religious parties. His real passions, however, were history and literature. A scientific historian he was not, and he would perhaps have denied that any one could be. He was a picturesque and argumentative narrator. Dogmatic, or rather positive, he may be. and yet he writes not like a professor, but like a man of the world. His experience of public life, especially in the House of Commons, was invaluable to a political historian. In describing the trial of the Seven Bishops, and in other places, he drew upon the technical information which he had acquired in reading for the Bar.

What is the true method of writing history? The school of which the Bishop of Oxford is the head, and to which the Bishop of London* belongs, regard it as a crime in a historian to be picturesque. He must not

* Dr. Creighton.

exaggerate, he must not colour, he must hardly even comment. He must report and, when necessary, explain. Of these principles the late Sir John Seeley in theory approved. But like most men he was better or worse than his theories, and his *Expansion of England* is a brilliant piece of rhetoric from beginning to end. The great Constitutional History which will always be associated with the name of Stubbs is a monument of learning, which can be flaunted in the face of a German professor when he talks about English shallowness. I am one of those who have read it through, and I shall always be glad that I did. But there is no use in disguising the fact that with the general public it has always been, and will always be, as much a sealed book as the philosophical works of Bentham or the antiquarian works of Selden. How well the Bishop of Oxford can write we know from his published lectures, and from passages in the Constitutional History itself, such as the characters of Henry VI. and of Cardinal Beaufort. But he apparently considered it beneath the dignity of a historian to write for those who are not serious students of history. Freeman, on the other hand, whose admiration of Dr. Stubbs bordered on idolatry, approached far more closely to the manner of Macaulay and of Dr. Arnold. But Freeman, with all his enthusiasm, was a pedant, and Macaulay, with all his learning, was a man of the world. Between these two schools, if schools they can be strictly called, is Mr. Rawson Gardiner, whose knowledge of the seventeenth century is only equalled by Mr. Firth, but who, if anything, somewhat underrates the average capacity of mankind. Platitude is a smaller fault in a historian than paradox, but it is a fault all the same. Hostile critics might perhaps say of Macaulay that he wrote like an

orator, as he spoke like a book. He treats his readers as a jury. Does he address them as an advocate or as a judge? No one, I suppose, would contend that the tone of his Essays was judicial. Most of them were contributed to the recognised organ of Whiggery, and on such a subject, for instance, as the impeachment of Warren Hastings, they simply express the Whig view.

But Macaulay is not to be appreciated by his Essays, which were in their nature ephemeral, and which were only republished in England because they had been pirated in the United States. He must stand or fall at the tribunal of posterity by the serious work of his life, to which he finally sacrificed every other object, social, personal, and political. The High Tory view of the History is no longer held. Time has softened the passions which raged over the Reform Bill, when for the last time the Whigs were reviled as the authors of Revolution. People seem to have long forgotten that the double Whig toast on the 30th of January was, 'Here's to the man with the mask, and here's to the man who would have done it without a mask.' A Whig now means, if it means anything, a Conservative who has not the courage to call himself by his proper name. The enemies of Macaulay at the present time assail rather his methods than his opinions, and so far they are clearly right, for a historian has as much right to his opinions as 'a Christian or an ordinary man.' They allege in substance that his History is a misplaced eulogy of a second-rate Dutchman, that he wrote a style in which the truth could not be told, that he was as much the mouthpiece of a party as counsel in court are the mouthpieces of their clients, that he confounded William Penn, the founder of Pennsylvania, with another person of the same name, and that he said the oaks of Magdalen

when he should have said the elms. The last charge is true. Macaulay would have been a wiser, he could not have been a happier, man if he had spared some time from reading books to observing nature. Whether William III. was a hero is a question upon which one may argue for ever. He was the bravest of the brave, as brave as Nelson or Havelock. That he was a wise and prudent statesman few will dispute. That he was an unsuccessful general no one can deny. The real issue is, not whether Macaulay overrated William, but whether a historian may lawfully write in glorification of a particular event and of those to whom it was due. That Macaulay did so is certain. He was a Whig of the seventeenth century, as well as of the nineteenth. He regarded the Revolution of 1688, which was really no revolution at all, but a change of dynasty, as the most beneficent of historical changes in England, and the origin of the modern progress in which he firmly believed. He sat down to prove a proposition. Nobody suggests that he did not honestly hold it. Nobody who knew what he was talking about would assert that Macaulay did not exhaust the materials at his disposal for ascertaining the truth. But it is said that his whole idea of history is wrong, that a historian must not be a partisan, and has no business to take a side.

I venture respectfully to deny this doctrine altogether. Perfect impartiality implies omniscience, and is not human but divine. We infer men's motives from their actions, or from their words, sometimes even from their silence. We cannot help ourselves. Only He who made them can see into men's hearts and minds. But the tests are fallible, and the results of them are often wrong. There is, indeed, an impartiality which is common enough, and which springs from understanding

neither side of the question. George Eliot's inn-keeper summed up every dispute in his parlour with the words, 'You're both right, and you're both wrong, as I always says.' The mental attitude is familiar to all who travel by land or water, but it would be of little service to a writer of history. Macaulay's own model of impartiality was Hallam. But in the first place Hallam was a Whig, and in the second place he has ceased to exercise any appreciable effect upon the world. It is characteristic of Macaulay that after finishing his first two volumes he re-read Thucydides. 'He is the one great historian,' he wrote in his diary. 'The rest one may hope to rival, him never.' Was Thucydides impartial? Mr. Grote vigorously denied it, and I think that Mr. Grote, though his zeal may have carried him too far, was in substance correct. We may dismiss as unproved and improbable the theory that Thucydides, in constructing his κτῆμα ἐς ἀεί, wished to avenge himself upon Cleon for his personal wrongs. That would have been an ἀγώνισμα ἐς τὸ παραχρῆμα indeed. But he had his object. He wished to show the defects of Athenian Democracy as tested by a great war. According to Macaulay's critics he was wrong. He had nothing to do with proving a case, one way or the other. He should have described the debates in the Assembly, the social troubles in Corcyra, the Sicilian expedition, and have left his readers to draw from his narrative whatever moral they pleased. Of one thing we may be sure. If Thucydides had taken that course he would not have been consulted by seventy generations as a storehouse of civil wisdom.

What Burke said of representatives is true also of historians. They owe to the public for whom they write, and the public have a right to demand from them, their judgment as well as their knowledge. If a man is not

better able to form an opinion upon his own subject than the majority of his readers he has no business to write at all. A judge is not impartial in the sense of being neutral. He takes a side, the side of the evidence, whether it be for the prisoner or against him. Even the Bishop of Oxford would not commend the American magistrate who, having been elected for his personal popularity rather than for his knowledge of law, thus addressed the jury: 'Well, gentlemen, if you think the prisoner guilty you ought to convict him. If you think him innocent you ought to acquit him. But if, like me, you don't understand the case, and can't make head or tail of the evidence, why, then, I'll be hanged if I know what you ought to do.' This may seem a flippant illustration of a grave matter. But the words of the imaginary judge are not a travesty, they are scarcely even a caricature, of the President's summing up at the Assize Court in Count Tolstoi's marvellous novel, 'Resurrection.' If Macaulay can be shown to have misstated facts, or to have drawn false inferences from facts correctly stated, he deserves censure for a heinous crime in the first place, for a serious error in the second. But the accusation that he wrote with a purpose seems to me no accusation at all. It may, of course, be argued that the judge makes up his mind, when he has one to make up, after hearing the evidence, and that Macaulay made up his mind before. But who shall say at what particular moment, and by what special process, a conviction dawns upon the mind? Macaulay wrote a eulogy of William III. when he was an undergraduate at Cambridge. But he was also at Cambridge when he said, 'I have been a Tory, I am a Radical, I will never be a Whig.' (Most men form their opinions first, and find their reasons for them afterwards.) It is not the

logical order, but man is not a logical animal, and even a logician must have something to start from. Macaulay was all his life a passionate student of history, and his prodigious memory retained almost everything that he read. When the facts were before him he was not given to doubt. But it is not true that he never changed his mind. In 1830 he was more like a Radical than a Whig. In 1850 he was more like a Conservative than either.

In his review of Macaulay's History Croker was said at the time to have contemplated murder and committed suicide. It was not merely an attack by the leading organ of Toryism upon the Whig historian. It was also an ebullition of personal jealousy and hatred. Many years afterwards, when Sir George Trevelyan's biography appeared, a very different sort of article was published in the *Quarterly Review*. The author of this article was Mr. Gladstone, who wrote with dignity and courtesy of his old antagonist on the question of Church and State. Mr. Gladstone said, truly enough, that Macaulay looked at religious subjects from the political side, and did not always appreciate the motives of the spiritually minded. He also accused him of a more strictly historical offence in systematically underrating the social position of the clergy at the close of the seventeenth century. Mr. Gladstone, as an ecclesiastical layman, was jealous for the honour of the cloth. But the bulk of the evidence is in favour of Macaulay's view. Swift was not a man to undervalue his profession, quite the reverse. He could not have written that excellent piece of low humour, Mrs. Harris's Petition to the Lords Justices, if the clergy had been treated as scholars and gentlemen in the reign of William III. Fielding's Parson Thwackum and Parson Trulliber belong to a

later generation. But Fielding had grown up in the period of which Macaulay treats, and he was too keen an observer to misrepresent palpable facts. By insistence upon a few points like this Macaulay's critics unconsciously acknowledge the difficulty of attacking him on larger grounds. His style is said to be framed for exaggeration, and better adapted for epigram than for truth. That Macaulay never exaggerated his warmest admirer would hardly assert. Like many smaller men, he was sometimes carried away by his theme, and incited to excess by the force of his own arguments. His love of antithesis, which is a rhetorical figure often useful and legitimate, fell at last into a trick, though always restrained within certain limits by the soundness of his taste and the delicacy of his ear. For it is a curious fact that, though Macaulay was utterly unmusical, and did not know 'God save the Queen' from the Hundredth Psalm, the scansion of verse and the rhythm of prose came to him, as reading and writing came to Dogberry, by nature.

To see things vividly and to express them strongly are not vices in a historian, unless the power be abused. Even if it be abused, as it was by Carlyle, who would lead one to suppose that from 1789 to 1794 the people of Paris cared for nothing except Revolution, it is still itself a merit, and not a defect. It is not literally true, or at least Macaulay cannot have known it to be true, that the physically weakest soldiers in the English and French armies at Landen were 'the hunchbacked dwarf who led the fiery onslaught of France, and the asthmatic skeleton who covered the slow retreat of England.' But intelligent readers do not require to be told that Macaulay cultivated the picturesque, and did not write his History as if he were

a witness in a court of law. He was determined to be read not only by students but also by the public, and, indeed, if a book be unreadable nobody much cares what else it is. Dulness is no proof of learning, and brilliancy does not connote shallowness except in the minds of the shallow. The despairing editor of a serious journal once said that the world was divided into people who knew what they were writing about but could not write and people who could write but did not know what they were writing about. Macaulay combined knowledge with the literary faculty, and to Dryasdust the combination has always been an offence. Macaulay himself was fond of the sergeant who 'shook his head at Murray as a wit'; Murray being the future Lord Mansfield, whose wit has proved more ephemeral than his law. Apart from detailed criticism, some of which is exceedingly interesting and important, the general accusation against Macaulay really resolves itself into this, that he overstated his case and was too much of his own opinion. I do not think it is altogether wise to deny that there is some truth in this charge. The proper answer is that the vehemence of Macaulay's Whiggery and the unqualified manner in which he condemns Marlborough and Penn are incidental defects of a very noble quality, the quality of moral indignation. Macaulay was no armchair politician judging of temptations which he had never felt, and of circumstances in which he had never been placed. He sat in the House of Commons, in the Cabinet, in the Council of the Governor-General of India. He knew public life as well as any man of letters ever knew it. But the knowledge did not make him a cynic or a pessimist. He had an almost passionate belief in the progress of society and in the greatness of England. For the

opponents of the one and the enemies of the other he had neither toleration nor forbearance.

To many readers Macaulay's incorrigible optimism is undoubtedly a source of irritation. They want to have it proved, not assumed, that the balance of change is improvement, and that current conceptions of progress are anything more than hypotheses of the mind. They must go to the philosophers. They will not find what they want in Macaulay. Macaulay was content to point out the growth and diffusion of wealth, the increase of liberty and of employment, assuming that, though material prosperity was not everything, it was accompanied by a rise of the moral and intellectual standard. It is an incomplete view, and its narrowness is probably the result of the conditions under which Macaulay's life was passed. He was born in the middle of the French war. Almost his earliest lines were dedicated to the memory of Pitt. He entered Parliament just before the introduction of the great Reform Bill. He witnessed the resumption of specie payments, the transformation of the criminal law, the establishment of representative municipalities, the repeal of the Corn Laws, the freedom of Catholics from odious restraints, the removal of the oppressive stamp upon newspapers, the adoption of the penny post. When he was born, England could only be called a free country by comparison with others. When he died, it was to all intents and purposes as free as it is to-day. His life rather more than covered the former half of the nineteenth century, and his view of progress was so far from being singular in his generation that it would have been singular to hold any other. I do not imagine that Macaulay consciously applied his experience of his own times to the age of the Revolution. But his avowed

theory was that the Long Parliament in the first place, and William of Orange in the second, laid the foundation of the glory and prosperity which England in his time enjoyed. He lived to see Russia defeated in the Crimea, and the Indian Mutiny suppressed. From 1815 to 1865 England was incontestably the greatest Power in the world. Macaulay had passed away before the consolidation of the United States and the establishment of the German Empire disturbed the balance. At the same time, it was his sober and serious conviction that only a morose and perverse mind could doubt the steadiness or the reality of the progress made by the country in the two hundred years before he wrote. In his time the race for wealth had not assumed its present intensity, business was conducted in a more sober spirit, and neither statesmen nor capitalists were sighing for more worlds to conquer.

It is a proof of ignorance to assert that Macaulay never admits the Whigs to be in the wrong. In his Introduction he argues elaborately, perhaps too elaborately, that both the innovating and the conservative tempers are necessary to the welfare of the State. The Whig persecution of the Catholics he condemns quite as strongly as Lingard, his respect for Clarendon is high, and for one of the non-juring Bishops, Ken, he expresses something like enthusiasm. The test by which Macaulay tries the men of James II.'s reign and of William III.'s is not Whiggery nor Toryism, but regard for the liberties of England. It is, indeed, difficult to find among the leading men of that time a consistent Whig or a consistent Tory, except perhaps Clarendon and Somers. Halifax, Macaulay's idol, ostentatiously proclaimed himself a Trimmer, and declared that the Trimmers were the salt of the earth. Dryden changed

his politics, as a lady changes her bonnets, with the fashion. Marlborough did not take the trouble to change them. He made himself safe by recognising in private the King at St. Germains and in public the King at Whitehall. Macaulay's approval is reserved for the honest opponents of James and Jeffreys, for the men who were prepared to face the consequences of resisting intolerable tyranny. All his admiration for the clear and subtle intellect of Halifax does not blind him to the weakness and hesitancy of the great Marquess when the hour for action arrived. Macaulay's History is a school of political virtue. No allowance is made there for treachery, for cruelty, for pretence. There is no attempt, even in the supreme instance of Marlborough, to set up national services as an excuse for personal dishonour. Macaulay did not, like Froude, take pleasure in paradox for its own sake, or delight in whitewashing a bad character because it had been painted in its true colours by previous historians. Perhaps he sometimes judged the actors in the Revolution, and in the events which preceded it, by the light of later circumstances such as they could not have foreseen. It is not the least merit of Bishop Creighton as a historian that, in his *History of the Papacy during the Reformation*, he has avoided this error, and carried his mind back to the ideas of the period which he describes. To do that requires imagination, and imagination was not Macaulay's strongest point. His strongest point, perhaps, is that he never debased the moral currency by lowering the moral standard.

The most serious, and by far the most interesting, attack upon Macaulay's fidelity as a historian is Mr. Paget's 'New Examen.' The quaint, and rather ugly, title suggested by the famous treatise of Roger North,

does less than justice to this most lively, ingenious, and entertaining work. Mr. Paget approached the subject from the lawyer's point of view, and to demand from the historian a regard for the technical rules of legal evidence is to make history almost impossible. The judge and jury who try a prisoner for a crime are not bound to find out the real criminal. If the prosecution cannot prove their case, the prisoner is acquitted, and the responsibility of the Court is at an end. When Macaulay undertook the task which he has so clearly described in his Preface, he laid himself, as every historian lays himself, under a much larger obligation. A state of doubt, philosophic or otherwise, yields no historical results. Macaulay may have been sometimes too confident. He affirmed without hesitation that Sir Philip Francis wrote the *Letters of Junius*. It is highly probable that he did, but it is by no means certain, and no jury would convict him if he were alive. Macaulay was quite sure that William III. had no guilty knowledge of the massacre at Glencoe, and that William Penn was an ignoble tool of the worst king who ever reigned in England. Mr. Paget disputes both propositions with subtlety and skill. The verdict of our latest, and not our least brilliant historian, Mr. Goldwin Smith, is with Macaulay on both points, and also on the treachery of Marlborough, which is no longer denied. Mr. Paget's Essays were originally published in *Blackwood's Magazine*, and the first appeared in the lifetime of Macaulay. It dealt with Glencoe, and sought to convict the King by quotations from his private letters. Macaulay, so far as I am aware, took no public notice of it. But there is an obvious reference to it in his Diary, accompanied with an expression of surprise that a serious critic of his History should imagine William III. to have con-

ducted his correspondence in English. The language employed by his Majesty was French, and Mr. Paget mistook the translation for the text. It is the more strange that he should have fallen into this error because Macaulay himself is at pains to point out that the King never became an Englishman. The Parliamentary inquiry held some years after the massacre traced it no further than the Master of Stair, and the Master was not the sort of man who would have allowed himself to be made a scapegoat.

On the subject of Penn, Macaulay received a deputation of indignant Quakers, among whom was William Edward Forster, afterwards Chief Secretary for Ireland. He listened to their arguments, made them a speech in reply, and considered that he had completely routed them. Their theory was, in brief, that there were two Penns, and that Macaulay had mistaken one for the other. They seem to have assumed, as so many excellent folk do assume, that the world is divided into bad people who never do anything very good, and good people who never do anything very bad. This is pushing the parable of the sheep and the goats too far. It is contradicted by the facts of life and the experience of mankind. If Marlborough had received his deserts in the reign of William, he would not have won the glorious victories which light up the reign of Anne. That the founder of Pennsylvania should have stooped to traffic in pardons is more painful than surprising. He is not the only honest man who has been corrupted by a Court. As Macaulay justly said, he was writing the History of England, and not the Life of Penn. It was not his fault if only the least creditable incidents in Penn's career fell within the range of his period and the scope of his subject. Macaulay's judgments were

not, I think, habitually severe. A staunch, if somewhat secular, Protestant, he could admire the majesty and dignity which belong to the Church of Rome. He certainly did full justice to the beneficent effects of her authority in those dark ages when there was nothing between lawless violence and the sway of the Church. His beautiful 'Epitaph on a Jacobite,' the most poetical of all his poems, shows how keenly he felt for the sorrows and the self-sacrifice of the party which he most disliked. For honest Tories, from Lord Nottingham to Sir Robert Inglis, he had the highest respect. But meanness, cruelty, and treachery moved him to a wrath which he made no effort to restrain. Without affecting to undervalue the ordinary rewards of political ambition, Macaulay had a hatred of bribery in every shape, which nothing could appease. He was the staunchest of patriots, in his later days a Palmerstonian, and he detested the enemies of England as if they were his own. He had none of Gibbon's cosmopolitan detachment from insular affairs, which so admirably fitted the latter to write what was really a history of mankind. If it had been the Master of Trinity, and not the Master of Balliol, who described himself as the head of the first college in the first university in the first country in the world, Macaulay would not have quarrelled with the description.

If there be any historian who wrote a style in which the truth cannot be told, it is Michelet and not Macaulay. Michelet's France is as vivid, as lurid, and as unreal as Balzac's. Macaulay is sometimes accused of being paradoxical, and sometimes of being commonplace. He often put plain truths in an epigrammatic form, as when he said that St. Kilda would not maintain a single pickpocket. The phrenologist who described

him as an historical painter may have been an ignorant mountebank, but in this particular instance he was not far wrong. Macaulay painted in rather glowing colours, and drew rather startling contrasts. He loved to show the contradictions of human nature, exhibited, as they so often are, in the same individual. It became a trick with him, almost a vice. But what serious historical event has this habit perverted or disturbed? When the History was a new book, Walter Bagehot, a keen and by no means enthusiastic critic, referred to the almost universal ignorance which prevailed among the educated classes in England concerning the close of the seventeenth century. Such an idea seems to this generation absolutely incredible. No period is better known now. Macaulay has formed and instructed the national opinion of events from the death of Charles II. to the Treaty of Ryswick. Is not that opinion substantially sound? There is still an apologist of Jeffreys. There may be apologists of James. There are men and women, loyal subjects, who call themselves Jacobites, but the bulk of the nation, whether they have read his history or not, are on the side of Macaulay. Macaulay personified and almost exaggerated the Englishman's love of compromise, his abhorrence of despotism, his passion for liberty, his independence, his adherence to ancient usage and ceremony. A humbler and less accomplished person than Macaulay might have taught that substance was more important than form, that tyranny justified rebellion, that the best revolution was a bloodless one, and that to let a king run away is wiser than to cut off his head. What Macaulay did was to clothe these obvious truths in the most attractive shape, to illustrate them by splendid examples, and to display them in a narrative which can never be obsolete. The

trial of the seven bishops, though it raised legal points which are not without interest even now, really resolved itself into the question whether the jury would find for the king or for the people. Macaulay, while never losing sight of the main issue, has developed the course of the struggle in the King's Bench with such consummate art that knowledge of the event does not interfere with the enjoyment of the reader.

No previous writer had done justice to William of Orange. If Macaulay has done him rather more than justice, he has at least supplied a grave defect. The King was not a man who blew his own trumpet. His faults, unless we adopt the atrocious libels of Jacobite pamphleteers, were all on the surface. His manners were ungracious, his sagacity was concealed, and his only conspicuous virtue was a courage at which the bravest men sometimes marvelled. His campaigns were unfortunate, and what Marlborough did after his death he had himself failed to do. But William was the pioneer. The great danger to Europe at the end of the seventeenth century was Louis XIV., as the great danger to Europe at the beginning of the nineteenth century was Napoleon. William III., in a fuller sense than William Pitt, was the pilot who weathered the storm. He realised before any other contemporary statesman that the base and ambitious charlatan who sat upon the throne of France, and was served by generals of whom he was quite unworthy, would destroy the liberties of mankind unless he were confronted by a Protestant coalition, which even he would be powerless to withstand. It was not love of England but hatred of Louis which animated the policy of the great King, the last Foreign Minister to wear a crown. Yet he was faithful to his trust, and was a far truer

benefactor to the country of his adoption than the Plantagenet conquerors of the Middle Ages. Modern England has been said to date from the Civil War. It really dates from the Revolution which destroyed the personal power of the King. William's position was peculiar. A King with a recent and a Parliamentary title can afford to assert his legal prerogatives without exciting the suspicion that he is hostile to Parliament. William III. vetoed Bills, which was more than George III. ever ventured to do. But his influence was derived from the force of a strong character and the memory of recent benefits, not from the kingly office, which the Stuarts had degraded beyond hope of restoration in its old form. Macaulay had to trace the origin of the Cabinet, that secret committee which has become the governing body of the Empire. The King presided at Cabinets, and so did Queen Anne. The accident that George I. knew no English gave to the Ministers without the Sovereign the power which they have exercised ever since. The Sovereign is entitled to be informed of what passes in Cabinet, and to demand the collective opinion of the Ministers in writing. But by that opinion the Sovereign is bound, subject to the chance of finding another set of Ministers who will be supported by the House of Commons.

Mr. Cotter Morison, who acquits Marlborough of treason and convicts Macaulay of misrepresentation on the utterly irrelevant ground that the French knew of the intended attack on Brest before Marlborough told them, was much delighted with a sentence he discovered in a letter from the historian to Macvey Napier: 'I shall not be satisfied,' Macaulay wrote, 'unless I produce something which shall for a few days supersede the last fashionable novel on the tables of young ladies.'

Mr. Morison triumphed greatly over this mare's nest. 'This, then,' he exclaimed, 'was Macaulay's polestar by which he guided his historical argosy over the waters of the past—young ladies for readers, laying down the novel of the season to take up his History of England.' Prodigious. But does 'I shall not be satisfied unless' mean 'I shall be satisfied if'? Did Mr. Morison ever read that other passage in which Macaulay said that he wrote with the year two thousand in view? Mr. Morison was a great admirer of Gibbon. Gibbon, in his *Autobiography*, boasts that his first two volumes were on almost every toilet-table. Gibbon, then, I suppose, wrote exclusively for young ladies, especially the Greek quotations in the notes, and would have been quite satisfied to supersede the *Castle of Otranto* in its ephemeral fame. To such nonsense are clever men led by the fallacy which associates dulness with learning. No book serves better the functions of a mirror than Macaulay's History. To the shallow and superficial it appears superficial and shallow. But the more a man studies the period which Macaulay chose for his own, the more will he be struck by the historian's mastery of the most obscure episodes and the most minute details. Even such well known works as the *Lives of the Norths*, and the political tracts of Lord Halifax, will show the mingled fidelity and skill with which Macaulay availed himself of his materials. Mr. Morison was unfortunate. He came, as Sancho Panza says, for wool, and went away shorn. He never lets poor Macaulay off. In the diary of his travels in Italy Macaulay says of the church of Santa Croce at Florence that it had 'an ugly, mean outside,' and that 'there was not much to admire in the architecture within.' That this is so any one can see for himself, and perhaps the

remark was not worth making. But Mr. Morison, thinking that all Italian churches were beautiful, or that Macaulay must be wrong on a matter of taste, prematurely invoked 'the shade of Mr. Ruskin.' This was particularly unlucky. For, as Mr. Rawson Gardiner pointed out at the time, Mr. Ruskin has said, with pardonable exaggeration, that Santa Croce is the ugliest Gothic church in the world. It was not often that Ruskin and Macaulay agreed.

The Essays stand, of course, upon a different footing. A historian cannot complain of any criticism, however searching, relentless, and minute. But Essays are not history. Macaulay's Essays have secured a permanent place in literature against his will, and almost without his consent. Some of them, such as the Essay on History, the Essay on Mirabeau, and the Essay on Barère, were not republished, and never would have been republished, while he lived. For permitting the re-issue of the others he pleaded the appearance of an incorrect version in America over which he had no control, and he made a special apology for the Essay on Milton, which he wrote when he was twenty-five, but which made him famous. They were, in fact, what would now be called pot-boilers, and their author originally designed for them a life of three months each in the pages of the *Edinburgh Review*. But *habent sua fata libelli*. The blind Fury with the abhorred shears did not present herself at quarter-day, and the Essays have now survived the writer forty years, without any perceptible diminution of their popularity. Some of them have been submitted to an exhaustively scientific dissection such as no similar works have ever been called upon to endure. The late James Spedding was one of the most learned and accomplished men of his time. He dedicated him-

self with passionate and disinterested enthusiasm to the study and defence of Bacon, whose works he edited, and whose Life he wrote. Mr. Spedding devoted two octavo volumes to an attack upon the first part, and the first part only, of Macaulay's Essay on Bacon. This book was written in the lifetime of Macaulay. It was not published till after the death of Mr. Spedding. It is called 'Evenings with a Reviewer.' Was such a compliment ever paid to a reviewer before or since? Mr. Spedding's principal object was to vindicate Bacon's memory from the charges of betraying Essex and of taking bribes. How far he has succeeded it is not for me to say. A more readable and instructive contribution to historical research it has seldom been my good fortune to meet. But it has, I think, one artistic defect. The form is that of a dialogue between A and B, the real persons being Spedding and Macaulay. It is, however, a sham fight. The fictitious Macaulay has little or nothing to say for himself. The real Macaulay would have had a good deal. Mr. Spedding points out that Bacon took money from both parties to a suit, after which he decided in accordance with the law. This apology strikes me as rather ingenious than sound. To Macaulay's argument that Bacon must have known the difference between right and wrong as well as the House of Commons who impeached him and the House of Lords who condemned him, Mr. Spedding replied that bribery at elections was denounced in public and condoned in private. But the moral difference between giving bribes and taking them cannot be altogether ignored.

The Essay thus treated by the first, though not the most impartial, of all authorities on Bacon was written in India by a busy Member of Council with very

imperfect materials at his command. The same cannot be said of the Essay on Warren Hastings, against which Sir James Fitzjames Stephen directed his heavy guns. Sir James was jealous for the purity of the judicial ermine, and he resented Macaulay's aspersions upon Sir Elijah Impey. This led him incidentally into a defence of Hastings, who was accused by Burke and Sheridan of conspiring with Impey to procure the conviction of Nuncomar. Fitzjames Stephen's two volumes are not quite so amusing as Mr. Spedding's, and the fact of their existence is perhaps not quite so complimentary to the Essayist. But they contain a very able attempt to prove that Hastings had nothing to do with the prosecution of Nuncomar, that the nominal prosecutor, a native, was also the real one, and that Impey, who had three puisne judges sitting with him, did no more than he was bound to do. It seems to me that a large part of this judicial apology for a judge is vitiated by the fallacy known as *ignoratio elenchi*. Most of the first volume is occupied with an elaborate argument that Nuncomar was guilty of felony by English law, which Macaulay does not deny. What Macaulay says is that it was monstrously cruel to hang a Hindoo for forgery, and it must be remembered that the judges had by statute the power of respiting the sentence. That Hastings instituted the proceedings against Nuncomar, Macaulay asserts without proving, and it cannot now, if it ever could, be proved. I think it must be admitted that in this Essay Macaulay assumed the Managers of the impeachment to be right, that he wrote, if one may say so, from their brief, and that he did not verify the facts by much original research. This would be a serious charge to bring against any part of the History. In reviewing Mr. Gleig's

book, Macaulay may pardonably have felt that a general and honest belief in the truth of the accusations against Hastings and Impey did not require to be substantiated by fresh and specific evidence. Sir Alfred Lyall has given the fairest account of the greatest man who ever ruled India. It was not the business of Hastings to be a saint or a hero, and he was unquestionably a statesman.

Matthew Arnold disputed Macaulay's claim to be a poet, and most of his verses, such as the celebrated 'Lays of Ancient Rome,' are undoubtedly rhetorical. But a definition of poetry which excludes the 'Epitaph on a Jacobite' can hardly be sound. The lines which Macaulay composed after his defeat at Edinburgh in 1847 are unequal, and may perhaps be open to the criticism that they exaggerate the loss of a seat. But their manliness and dignity, touched as they are with sincere emotion, give them a peculiar and personal interest of their own. Macaulay certainly had the poetic gift when he was young, as his Byronic 'Sermon in a Churchyard' is enough to show. He was twenty-five when he wrote it, and one stanza will be read with interest, if only for the closing line:

> Here learn that all the griefs and joys,
> Which now torment, which now beguile,
> Are children's hurts, and children's toys,
> Scarce worthy of one bitter smile.
> Here learn that pulpit, throne, and press,
> Sword, sceptre, lyre, alike are frail,
> That science is a blind man's guess,
> And history a nurse's tale.

Macaulay's cynicism was skin deep, and did not last long. Though he felt private griefs, and even such things as the marriage of a sister, which most people would not regard as griefs at all, with peculiar intensity, he was an incorrigible optimist in public affairs. This

optimism pervades his History, and perhaps annoys more readers than his Whig principles or prejudices. It led Miss Martineau to make the blunt remark that he had no heart. How affectionate was his real nature every one now knows. His reflections on the death of Monmouth show that he felt, with the old Roman poet, how things had their tears. I mean, of course, the description of St. Peter's Chapel in the Tower, where Monmouth was buried.

> In truth there is no sadder spot on the earth than that little cemetery. Death is there associated not, as in Westminster Abbey and St. Paul's, with genius and virtue, with public veneration and imperishable renown; not, as in our humblest churches and churchyards, with everything that is most endearing in social and domestic charities; but with whatever is darkest in human nature and in human destiny; with the savage triumph of implacable enemies; with the inconstancy, the ingratitude, the cowardice of friends; with all the miseries of fallen greatness and of blighted fame. Thither have been carried through successive ages, by the rude hands of gaolers, without one mourner following, the bleeding relics of men who had been the captains of armies, the leaders of parties, the oracles of senates, and the ornaments of courts. Thither was borne, before the window where Jane Grey was praying, the mangled corpse of Guilford Dudley. Edward Seymour, Duke of Somerset and Protector of the Realm, reposes there by the brother whom he murdered. There has mouldered away the headless trunk of John Fisher, Bishop of Rochester and Cardinal of St. Vitalis, a man worthy to have lived in a better age, and died in a better cause. There are laid John Dudley, Duke of Northumberland, Lord High Admiral, and Thomas Cromwell, Earl of Essex, Lord High Treasurer. There, too, is another Essex, on whom nature and fortune had lavished all their bounties in vain, and whom valour, grace, genius, royal favour, popular applause, conducted to an early and ignominious doom. Not far off sleep two chiefs of the great house of Howard, Thomas, fourth Duke of Norfolk, and Philip, eleventh Earl of Arundel. Here and there among the thick graves of unquiet and aspiring statesmen lie more delicate sufferers: Margaret of Salisbury, the last of the proud name of Plantagenet, and those two fair queens who perished by the jealous rage of Henry.

Macaulay was a great historian, but he was not a historian alone. His History is a noble lesson in the principles of Constitutional freedom and respect for civil justice. The moral of it is contained in the celebrated

reply of Sergeant Maynard to the Prince of Orange. 'You must,' said William, 'have survived most of your contemporaries in the law.' 'Yes, sir, and if it had not been for your Highness I should have survived the law too.' Macaulay's life as a writer and as a politician was consecrated to the service of freedom. His style is far from perfect. It has often a hard sound and a metallic look. To say with Matthew Arnold that it has the perpetual semblance of hitting the right nail on the head without the reality is in my judgment absurd. Macaulay habitually hit the right nail on the head, and he did not, as Mr. Arnold sometimes did, knock out two tacks in the process. But there is always the semblance as well as the reality, and it is the reality without the semblance which charms us in the greatest writers of all. It would have been better for Macaulay if he had written less like Gibbon and more like Swift. But it was hard writing, and therefore it is easy reading. He worked to save his readers the trouble he took himself, and he deserves their gratitude as well as their admiration. 'Mr. Scarlett a great lawyer?' said the honest Yorkshireman, discussing the leaders of the Northern Circuit, 'why, he always has such easy cases.' To make a simple thing complicated will attract more praise from some critics than to make a complicated thing simple. Thackeray has described Macaulay's labour and its results with exquisite felicity.

> Take [he says] at hazard any three pages of the 'Essays, or the History,' and shimmering below the stream of the narrative, as it were, you, an average reader, see one, two, three, a half-score of allusions to other historic facts, characters, literature, poetry, with which you are acquainted. Why is that epithet used? Whence is that simile drawn? How does he manage, in two or three words, to paint an individual, or to indicate a landscape? Your neighbour, who has *his* reading, and his little stock of literature stowed away in his mind, shall detect more points, allusions, happy touches, indicating not only the

prodigious memory and vast learning of this master, but the wonderful industry, the honest, humble, previous toil of this great scholar. He reads twenty books to write a sentence; he travels a hundred miles to make a line of description.

In one class of writing Macaulay was easily first. The short biographies of Atterbury, Bunyan, Goldsmith, Johnson, and Pitt, which he contributed to the *Encyclopædia Britannica*, are perfect models of artistic condensation. Yet, if I may say so, I can never forgive Macaulay for his cruel and unaccountable injustice to Mrs. Thrale.

There is one point in which Macaulay, who had otherwise small reason to complain of fortune, did not receive his due while he was alive. Apart from his books, his chief service to mankind was the Indian Penal Code. Yet even after his death Miss Martineau could write:

> The story of that unhappy Code is well known. It is usually spoken of by Whig leaders as merely shelved, and ready for reproduction at some time of leisure; but the fact is that there is scarcely a definition that will stand the examination of lawyer or layman for an instant, and scarcely a description or provision through which a coach and horses may not be driven. All hope of Macaulay as a lawyer, and also as a philosopher, was over for any one who had seen that Code.

Macaulay's Code is now the law throughout the length and breadth of British India. It is so clear that few legal difficulties have been raised on it, and hardly any amendments have been made in it. It has been pronounced by high authority superior in all essential particulars to the Penal Code of France, to the North German Code of 1871, and to Livingstone's famous Code of Louisiana. The Code was drawn up by a Commission, of which Macaulay was only chairman. But no intelligent person can read a paragraph of it without perceiving from internal evidence that Macaulay was its real author. Few men of letters have done a more important bit of

practical work. But, of course, it is not as a legislator that Macaulay will be remembered. Sir George Trevelyan speaks of the sacrifices which he made to literature. They have been well repaid. One could as well imagine European history without Napoleon as English literature without Macaulay.

*March*, 1900.

# THE AUTOCRAT OF THE DINNER TABLE

The seventy years of John Selden's life began with the England of the great Queen, and ended with the England of the great Protector. Mark Pattison regarded him, not without reason, as a typical Englishman. He was never out of England, but, as Ben Jonson said of him, though he stayed at home, he knew the world. His learning was prodigious, even for a learned age, and yet he was conspicuously practical, even in the practical art of politics. He was one of the few lawyers who attained great eminence in the House of Commons, and one of the few statesmen who ever held their own in an assembly of divines. His published writings, except the *History of Tythes*, are dead, and even the *History of Tythes* is only consulted by professional students. He wrote a style which can never have been read with pleasure, and can scarcely now be read at all. *Stilus optimus magister dicendi*, says Crassus in the *De Oratore*—'The pen is the best master of speech.'* It was so with Cicero, it was so with Burke, it was so in our own day with Macaulay. But in Selden's case it was far otherwise. His pen had to be taken away from him before his mind could flow clearly and easily through natural channels. He lived, of course, long before the days of Parliamentary reporting. But by the general consent of his contemporaries

* The exact words are *Stilus optimus et præstantissimus dicendi effector et magister.* They have the air in the dialogue of a familiar quotation, but I cannot indicate their original source.

he was one of the most powerful and effective debaters in Parliament. So, among others, says Clarendon, an unsparing critic of his books, and himself a consummate master of all the rich resources of our English tongue. Selden's speeches have perished, like Strafford's, and Eliot's, and Pym's. The happy accident which has preserved his *Table Talk* enables us to see for ourselves the immeasurable superiority of his spoken to his written word. Scarcely any book in the English language has a value so utterly disproportionate to its size. The duodecimo edition of 1847 can be carried comfortably in the pocket. The larger and more elaborate volume, brought out by the late Mr. Harvey Reynolds in 1892, contains only two hundred pages. These pages show us how an accomplished man, famous for his conversation, entertained his company more than two hundred and fifty years ago. The knowledge is priceless, and would be so even if the publication of the book thirty-four years after Selden's death had led to no direct result. But it is impossible to read Selden's witty aphorisms and brilliant illustrations without perceiving how much the great talker of the eighteenth century was indebted to the great talker of the seventeenth. It is no disparagement of a strong man's original force to say that Samuel Johnson derived his colloquial manner from John Selden.

If Selden had lived in ordinary times, his career would have been uneventful, for he was neither adventurous nor ambitious. Civil troubles forced him into prominence, and when he was compelled to take an active part in public affairs he showed that he was no timeserver, but a man of principle. He had the intellectual honesty which is to some men what morality or enthusiasm is to others. He would not make a fool of

himself by saying what he knew to be untrue. In deference to King James he expressed regret for having argued that tithes were not payable by divine law. To retract the argument, to acknowledge himself in the wrong, he absolutely refused. Selden belonged to the middle class, which in this country more than in any other answers Aristotle's description, and acts as the bulwark of the State. He was a native of Sussex, and received his early education at the free school of Chichester. From Chichester he went to Oxford, with which for the remainder of his life he was destined to be connected. He matriculated at Hart Hall, and it is curious that this great scholar, who represented the University throughout the Long Parliament, took no degree. He was called to the Bar at the Inner Temple, and, so far as he adopted any profession, he adopted the profession of the law. But his heart was in study, and in the larger affairs of State. Two views of the law of England have come down to us from the seventeenth century. To Sir Edward Coke it was the perfection of human reason, to Oliver Cromwell it was a tortuous and ungodly jumble. Selden was too much of an antiquary to agree with Cromwell, and too much of a philosopher to agree with Coke. He must very soon have mastered whatever the law-books of those days could teach him, and in legal learning he had no superior at the Bar or on the Bench. He was a conveyancer, and had a large amount of chamber practice. But he is said to have appeared in court only when his vast knowledge was required by some case of unusual character and special importance. He became, when he was quite a young man, steward to Henry Grey, ninth Earl of Kent, and his close connection with that family only ended with the death of the Countess, three

years before his own. One consequence of this appointment was that he spent his vacations at Wrest, in Bedfordshire, Lord Kent's country house. Another was, that after the Earl's death he came to live at Lady Kent's townhouse, the Carmelites, in Whitefriars, where he kept his splendid library and his choice collection of Greek Marbles. If he was ever married at all, he was privately married to Lady Kent. Sir Edward Fry, from whose admirable article in the *Dictionary of National Biography* I have taken the facts of Selden's life, does not believe the story of the marriage. In any case, there was no scandal, which is creditable to the somewhat censorious society of the time.

Like Lord Mansfield, who in his youth 'drank champagne with the wits,' Selden enjoyed the best of good company from the first. He was the friend of Ben Johson, of Camden the famous author of *Britannia*, and of Sir Robert Cotton the antiquary, at whose house in Palace Yard he read and studied. His *History of Tythes* from the days of Melchisedec appeared in 1617, and he soon discovered that England was not a free country. For denying what was called the *jure divino-ship* of the clerical tenth he was haled before the High Commission, and apologised lest worse should happen to him. He did not follow the example of Galileo by retracting as error what he believed to be truth, but he submitted to the jurisdiction. The incident is thoroughly characteristic. Selden had a profound contempt for 'both the great vulgar and the small.' He did not care two straws what the High Commission thought about a matter of which they knew nothing. He felt all the difference between his own learning and the learning of King James. But he sincerely respected law and order. His mind was not naturally speculative,

like the mind of his illustrious friend Thomas Hobbes, but practical and historical. If the Commissioners chose to talk nonsense, that was their affair. He submitted to their authority without prejudice to his contempt for their understandings. Nor was he cast (few men are) in the heroic mould. When it was his duty to express an opinion, he never shrank from expressing it because it was dangerous or unpopular. But to go to prison for a theory of tithes he regarded as absurd, and as the times grew more turbulent he may have thought that the supply of martyrs was likely to exceed the demand. He was not, however, timid like Hobbes. He braved the wrath of King Charles by acting as a manager in the impeachment of Buckingham, and risked the vengeance of a Parliamentary majority by opposing the impeachment of Strafford. Nor did he always escape the penalty of his boldness. In 1629 he was committed to the Tower with Eliot, Holles, and six other Members of Parliament. He was shifted from prison to prison, and was not finally released till 1631. But it is a curious fact, as Sir Edward Fry points out, that he bore no malice against the King. He must have been a man of singularly even temper, cold but placable, never carried out of his way by enthusiasm or resentment, or by that passion for notoriety which has been the motive of so many otherwise inexplicable acts.

Selden sat in Parliament successively for Lancaster, for Great Bedwin, for Ludgershall, and for the University of Oxford. Soon after the meeting of the Long Parliament his colleague in the representation of the University died, his place was not filled up, and Selden became the sole representative. Never, before or since, has Oxford been better served. Devoted to the interests

of learning and education, he regarded with a jealous fondness the noble institution to which he belonged. In days of fierce faction, of revolution, of civil conflict, he preserved a judicial calmness almost inhuman in its austere severity. He would have liked to see the dispute between the King and the Parliament decided by four judges sitting in banc, if only the judges had been, as they afterwards became, independent of the Crown. He had had the honour to be counsel for Hampden in 1627. He had the courage to refuse security for good behaviour when he and other Members where arraigned for words spoken in the House of Commons in 1629. But if he had had his way, he would have protected the legal rights of the Sovereign against the encroachments of the Commons, as he protected the rights of the subject against legal tyranny. When politics sank into what he called a scuffle, and both parties appealed to the sword, Selden withdrew into privacy, and left them to fight it out. Even in 1642 he refused an offer to join the King at York. He was then fifty-eight, well provided with this world's goods, a lover of ease, and, as Clarendon says, would not have made a journey to York or slept out of his own bed for all the preferment at the disposal of the Crown. He was content and proud to have been 'one of the Parliament men imprisoned *tertio Caroli*.' That was as near martyrdom as he got or desired to get. He never held any office, and in 1645 he refused, perhaps from loyalty to Oxford, the Mastership of Trinity Hall, which has often been held by a lawyer, almost always by a layman. At the Westminster Assembly of 1643 he was a prominent, if not altogether a popular figure. He knew more theology than Lord Melbourne, and was even fonder of flinging it at the

heads of the Bishops. He had, with far deeper erudition, the same caustic humour, and he played havoc with the Westminster Divines. 'Perhaps it may be so,' he used to tell them, 'in your little pocket Bibles with gilt edges; but the Hebrew (or the Greek) is so and so.' And so and so it remained to them, for very few of them could meet him on his own ground. They did not like to be taught by a scholar and a man of the world, who studied the Bible as he studied the classics; but they had to put up with it, and the constitution of the Church which Parliament adopted from the Westminster Assembly is chiefly due to John Selden, Esquire, M.P. Selden was a Churchman, and I see no reason to doubt, with Mr. Harvey Reynolds, that he was, as Sir Matthew Hale described him, a 'resolved, serious Christian.' But he had more sympathy with the Presbyterians than with the High Church, and it was a fundamental principle of his creed that no ecclesiastical system was of divine origin. Christ, he held, taught religion and morality, not forms of discipline and administration. So far as they were concerned, all was as the State pleased. In short, he was a consistent, logical, unflinching Erastian, as all upholders of the connection between Church and State must, consciously or unconsciously, be.

Selden's *Table Talk* covers the last twenty years of his life, from 1634 to 1654. It is probable that during most of that time he resided under Lady Kent's roof, occupying his own sumptuous apartments in her large and beautiful house near the Temple and the river. Though himself a man temperate in all things, he was extremely hospitable, and famous for his good dinners. His guests had better entertainment than food and wine, for there have been few such brilliant

talkers as Selden. The crabbed English, and the still more crabbed Latin, of his books present a strange contrast to the racy vernacular of his delightful conversation. A shrewd, cynical, sarcastic, but not unkindly observer of men and things, he always went straight to the heart of his subject, and his command of humourous illustration was scarcely surpassed by Swift. I cannot help thinking that Mr. Reynolds was too severe upon his indecency. There are perhaps half a dozen passages which a delicate taste might censure. But we have no reason to suppose that they were uttered in the presence of women, and they are purity itself when compared with the habitual converse of the succeeding age. Of his alleged impiety there is no trace, though he handled ecclesiastical subjects with a homely freedom. From the superstitions of his time he was absolutely exempt, and nothing can be more delicious than his own account of the way in which by means of an amulet he cast out sham devils from a self-tormented friend. His secretary, Richard Milward, to whom we are indebted for these flashes of a master mind, observes that the origin of the sayings will be proved to all Selden's acquaintance by 'the familiar illustrations wherewith they are set off.'

One of the most justly famous occurs under the heading of 'Bishops.' Selden's habitual tolerance broke down at Bishops. He had no use for them out of Parliament, and even went so far as to deny that they were a separate order in the Church. One can easily imagine how a man like Selden must have been irritated by the fussy, domineering arrogance of the man whom Carlyle profanely calls W. Cant. The Long Parliament never did a more foolish thing than when they made a martyr of Laud.

'The Bishops,' says Selden, 'were too hasty, else with a discreet slowness they might have had what they aimed at. The old story of the fellow that told the gentleman he might get to such a place if he did not ride too fast would have fitted their turn.'

And not their turn only. The apologue should be hung up, framed and glazed, in every public office, from the Colonial Office downwards. That is the best of Selden. He always sticks to the point, and yet he throws out pregnant hints for general application to human affairs. *Festina lente* looks like a frigid paradox, though it is not so. The story of the fellow that told the gentleman is 'the wisdom of many, and the wit of one.'

Selden's mind was essentially political—even more political than legal. He was under the personal influence of Hobbes, though his ideal of constitutional monarchy was entirely opposed to Hobbes's absolute doctrines. Selden was certainly no democrat. He believed in the natural supremacy of the leisurely and educated classes, and he probably held that, as Bishop Horsley put it, more than a century later, the mass of the people had nothing to do with the laws except to obey them. Of Parliamentary freedom he was a devotee, but to the notion of self-government in its widest sense he was a stranger. Like a good Erastian, he desired the retention of the Bishops in the House of Lords, and stoutly maintained against all comers that they sat there by as good a right as the hereditary peers. 'To take away Bishops' votes,' he said, 'is but the beginning to take them away; for then they can be of no longer use to the King or State. 'Tis but like the little wimble to let in the greater auger.' It is amusing to find our old friend, the thin end of the wedge, in this

early and rudimentary form. Selden's conception of a Bishop was rather like that of Lord Westbury, who said in the Judicial Committee, of Bishops Gray and Colenso, 'Both these ecclesiastical persons are creatures of the law.' For apostolical succession he did not care a rap. A Bishop not a Lord of Parliament was to him no Bishop at all, which of course implied that he had no faith in Episcopacy as a divine or even as a human institution. As a matter of historical fact he was right, and he lived to see it; for in 1646, by ordinance of Parliament, the 'name, title, style and dignity of Archbishop and Bishop were wholly taken away.' It is true that there are now Bishops, suffragans and others, who have no seats in the House of Lords, and that the Bishop of Sodor and Man never had a vote. But they are exceptions, and, in the true meaning of the Latin proverb, the existence of exceptions proves the existence of a rule. On another occasion Selden declared his own views with a dogmatic severity unusual in him. 'They are equally mad,' he exclaimed, 'who say Bishops are so *jure divino* that they must be continued, and they who say they are so anti-Christian that they must be put away. All is as the State likes.' It would have been a strong thing to affirm that all Roman Catholics and all Presbyterians were mad, or even unreasonable, which is what Selden meant. But he was a staunch Church of England man, regarding the Church as part of the Constitution, and he spoke as an ecclesiastical lawyer.

The popular theology of his time was by no means to Selden's taste, and that is no doubt why he was accused of irreligion. He suffered in that as in other respects for being in advance of his age. He belonged as a theologian rather to the nineteenth century than to the seventeenth, and would have found himself in perfect

agreement with Thirlwall or Stanley. His contrast between Christianity and Mahommedanism is curiously modern.

> The Turks tell their people of a heaven where there is a sensible pleasure, but of a hell where they shall suffer they do not know what. The Christians quite invert this order. They tell us of a hell where we shall feel sensible pain, but of a heaven where we shall enjoy we cannot tell what.

Neither Milton nor Bunyan can be said altogether to have escaped the application of this caustic criticism. Selden had what the French call the positive spirit, which is sensible of its own limitations, and will not go beyond them. The imagination of his time, especially the Puritan imagination, ran riot in the wildest fancies of future woe for the enemies of the saints, and Selden, though a man of high character, must have been conscious that he was no saint. He was one of those who would rather live up to a comparatively low standard than fall short of a comparatively high one. He must have secretly sympathised with the young man in the parable who went away sorrowful because he had great possessions. He took the Englishman's love of compromise into religion as well as into politics, and with the whole force of his nature he hated extremes. There are traces in his *Table Talk* of the Baconian temper, the grave, dignified, philosophic calm with which an intellect, unclouded by passion or prejudice, contemplates the wild surging of ignorant enthusiasm in its desperate efforts to find truth where there is no road.

'The laws of the Church are most favourable to the Church, because they were the Church's own making; as the heralds are the best gentlemen, because they make their own pedigree.' This is an invaluable text for the Erastian in all times. It is also a perfect specimen of Selden's best manner. There is not a word

too much in it; it condenses a whole theory into a couple of sentences, of which one is fact and the other illustration. In a regular treatise it would have to be expanded, or to be followed by a formal essay. In talk it is just as it should be. Selden had a singular gift of conversational completeness. He could sum up and dismiss a subject in a phrase which adhered to the memory while memory remained. Perhaps the talker who most resembled him in this particular was Talleyrand. The Duke of Wellington was once asked whether he considered Talleyrand to be good company. He replied that in the ordinary sense of the term he was not. 'He would often,' added the Duke, sit silent for hours. But once or twice in an evening he would say something which you could not forget as long as you lived.' We do not know how large a share Selden took in the talk at his own dinner table. Probably it was much larger than Talleyrand's, and we only have scattered fragments of it in Mr. Milward's record. But we have quite enough to show us of what sort it was. It did not burst out in a torrent, like Johnson's, or flow in a rich volume like Coleridge's. Johnson owed much to Selden, but his own natural eloquence swept away all barriers. Selden kept his temper, and was not easily moved to sympathy or to indignation. He must have been, I think, a good listener, not because he was patient of contradiction or ready to be convinced, but because he wished to have the last word. When he said a thing it was to be so. His natural dignity and acquired information gave him a legitimate advantage of which he must have been fully aware.

Having compared Convocation with a court leet, Selden, like a good Protestant, turned his guns upon the

General Councils of the Church of Rome. 'They talk (but blasphemously enough) that the Holy Ghost is President of their General Councils, when the truth is, the odd man is still the Holy Ghost.' By the odd man he meant of course the majority. The charge of blasphemy might perhaps be retorted, though I think without reason, by those against whom it was directed. Selden, in common with many men whose religion lies altogether below the surface, was disgusted by its unseasonable intrusion. It affronted his sense of reverence as much as it irritated his intellect to hear men say that an issue would be determined by inspiration when they knew that it would be determined by numbers. But it is true of this as of almost all his wise and pithy sayings, that they have an application far wider than that which he originally gave them. There is not much outward resemblance between a Council of the Church and a political convention in the United States. But a belief in the infallibility of the odd man is a political as well as a theological superstition. Those who support representative and democratic government merely as the fairest and most convenient method yet discovered for carrying out the will of a free people are beyond the reach of Selden's sarcasm. Yet it may be useful even for them to be reminded that the rule of majorities is an arrangement, not a principle, and that truth must often be on the losing side. Selden had too much of Horace's contempt for the unholy mob, who, after all, may be presumed to know their own minds and understand their own business. He did not always remember, though he knew, that there might be men as learned as himself without a hundredth part of his practical sagacity, and that, on the other hand, shrewd mother-wit is a safer guide through life than learning. A Conservative will not get

much good out of Selden, who will only strengthen him in his prejudices. But as a cooling medium for enthusiastic democrats I venture to recommend the *Table Talk*.

It would be interesting to know what Selden thought of James the First. He often quotes that highly educated monarch, with whom he argued about the divine right of tithes and other matters. The right divine of kings to govern wrong was His Majesty's favourite tenet, and he believed also in the divine right of Episcopacy, because, as he tersely said, 'No Bishop, no King.' Indeed, James's nation of his own attributes and of the sacrosanctity of the system which made him possible left little scope for the Governor of the Universe. Selden had old scores to pay off against the King, and he laughed at him after his death in a characteristic fashion by telling an anecdote. Henry the Fourth of France was killed, observes Selden, according to some, for his apostasy; according to others, for his debauchery. 'No,' says King James (who could not abide fighting), 'he was killed for permitting duels in his kingdom.' 'Commonly,' adds the table talker, 'we say judgment falls upon a man for something in him we cannot abide.' That is the secular and mundane version of the moral drawn for all time in the Gospels from the fall of the Tower of Siloam. In a homelier vein is 'Old friends are best. King James used to call for his old shoes; they were easiest for his feet.' That is all. Selden did not often elaborate, if we may trust, as surely we can trust, his constant friend and companion, Mr. Milward. He had not the fault of our English nation that when they have a good thing they make it too common. The worse and most tiresome talkers are those who worry a subject to death. Selden threw out a hint, sometimes

shot a Parthian arrow, and passed on. He knew better than to deliver in conversation an essay on friendship. Everyone feels the comfort of old shoes. Selden was too fond of old shoes, too worldly a sage, too fond of peace and wealth. As he grew older he became more and more impressed with the sinfulness of being uncomfortable. I can hear the impassioned moralist declaim against the low view of friendship which Selden's apophthegm implies. It was not intended to be exhaustive, but to be suggestive. It was table talk.

'No man,' says Selden, 'is the wiser for his learning.' He had a right to this paradox, and, as in all paradoxes worthy of the name, there is some truth in it. But it is difficult to conceive Selden apart from his learning, or to suppose that the inexhaustible wealth of illustration with which it supplied him did not suggest new ideas, besides enriching and adorning the old. Yet, on the other hand, we may say with confidence that Selden's wisdom is often most manifest in the homeliest images. Like Bacon he took a low view of marriage ; he called it a 'desperate thing,' and he had little respect for the minds of women. The frogs in Æsop, he tells us, were exceeding wise, because they would not venture themselves into the well, although they longed to drink. That is rather a cheap form of cynicism, and below Selden's powers. On the other hand, nothing can be better than his example of the old truth that we measure the excellency of other men by some excellency we conceive to be in ourselves. 'Nash, a poet, poor enough (as poets used to be), seeing an alderman with his gold chain, upon his great horse, by way of scorn, said to one of his companions, "Do you see yon fellow, how goodly, how big he looks? Why, that fellow cannot make a blank verse."' Selden goes on to preach a little sermon

against what is or was called Anthropomorphism, the only answer to which is that if we do not think of God in human terms we cannot think of Him at all. We know too well from daily experience that blank verse of a sort can be made by anyone, and we have had not only Aldermen but Lord Mayors who could ride to hounds. After Tennyson poverty can no longer be safely predicated of poets, and Ben Jonson, the admiring friend of Selden, was in easy circumstances. But poor Nash and irrelevant contempt are as perennial as human nature itself. Most of us have far more respect for Nash than we should have if he had envied the Alderman his great horse and his gold chain. He at least respected himself, and a blank verse of Shakespeare's or Milton's is worth all the gold chains in the world.

Others of Selden's contemporaries were illogical besides poor Nash. Selden was an attentive critic of sermons, which he did not always hear with humble submission. 'Preachers,' says he, 'will bring anything into a text. The young Masters of Arts preached against non-residence in the University; whereupon the Heads made an order that no man should meddle with anything but what was in the text. The next day one preached upon these words. *Abraham* begat *Isaac;* when he had gone a good way, at last he observed that Abraham was resident, for if he had been non-resident he could never have begot Isaac; and so fell foul upon the non-residents.' Queen Elizabeth was a stickler for relevancy in sermons. She loved to tune the pulpits, and her famous 'Stick to your text, Mr. Dean,' is historical. It is not perhaps unnatural that the clergy, having to connect their thoughts with a verse of scripture, which after all is limited, should sometimes

be in sore straits. 'Hear the Church' was very tempting, and to leave out the condition as easy as lying. Archbishop Whately's pungent comment, 'I should like to hear that young man preach on "Hang all the law and the prophets,"' was quite in Selden's vein. I suspect that Selden, like many laymen, would have liked to preach himself, and that when he attended the Westminster Assembly the pent-up energies of years broke out in a flood which astonished the divines. 'For a man of the world,' said Burke, in reference to religious questions—'for a man of the world, I have thought of these things.' Selden had thought, and read, and written on many ecclesiastical subjects. He was not to be taught by parsons, who were, as he reminded them, only 'persons' differently spelt. Mr. Reynolds has pointed out that he contradicted himself about their learning, which in one place he extols and in another denies. But substantially he agreed with Clarendon that they had bad judgment, and were unsafe guides in mundane affairs. Selden practised his own theories. One great merit of his talk is that it always goes straight to the point. His stories, like Lincoln's, are always told for a purpose, and never because he had a story to tell. Abraham Lincoln was probably the best story-teller known to fame. There may have been mute, inglorious Lincolns, who equalled him in that respect, if in no other way. But of Lincoln it was said, and of Lincoln only could it be said, that he illustrated by a story every argument he used, that he invented every story he told, and that he never told the same story twice. Selden's stories were not invented. He had a wonderful memory, upon which he drew freely, but he never dragged his anecdotes in by the head and ears, nor did he dilute them or spin them out. They are

short, pithy, pointed, easy to remember, and impossible to misunderstand. The man who is determined to tell his favourite story or the last story he has heard, whether there be a legitimate opening for it or not, destroys conversation, and ought to be destroyed himself. There should be a heavy social penalty for the use of the phrase 'By the way, that reminds me.' If a story does not explain itself, if its connection with the subject is not at once seen, both it and its narrator are social solecisms. Soli is their native town, although they never heard of it.

The most profound and searching of all Selden's utterances is partly characteristic of his age, but far more characteristic of him. 'Aye or no never answered any question. The not distinguishing where things should be distinguished, and the not confounding where things should be confounded, is the cause of all the mistakes in the world.' One would give a good deal to know the precise occasion on which this deep and subtle remark was made. The when and the why, as Mr. Milward justly observes in his dedication to the Executors, give these sentences the more life and the smarter relish. Unfortunately he did not supply the want, and to guess is futile. All we know is that a 'doubt' of some kind had been 'propounded.' It may have been whether monarchy was the best form of government, or whether a subject was justified in resisting his sovereign, or whether faith without works was more salutary than works without faith. But tantalising as our ignorance is, we can fall back upon the general truth of the apophthegm. There are questions which answer themselves, because they are questions only in form. Where there is a real dispute, aye or no raises more difficulties than it solves. It is easy to lay down universal propo-

sitions. The difficulty arises when we come to apply them. Selden lived in stirring times, full of action and speculation, when erroneous opinions might at any moment lead to some blunder which was worse than a crime. The impartial historian, if such a superhuman being were possible, could not acquit either the Court or the Parliament of serious and even fatal errors. They were both always answering aye or no to every question, until Charles lost his crown and his head because he would be a despot or nothing, and Cromwell, the vindicator of national rights, had to rule England without a Parliament by military force. They both confounded things which ought to be distinguished, and distinguished things which ought to be confounded. In an age of political philosophy the voice of the philosopher was unheeded.

It is, I am afraid, arguable that Selden was a lukewarm patriot. No man more thoroughly enjoyed that pleasure of looking down upon the errors of the vulgar which Lucretius has so magnificently described. Not that he had any ill-will to either party. He bore no malice, he harboured no feeling fiercer than contempt.

> Non quia vexari quemquam est jucunda voluptas,
> Sed quibus ipse malis careas quia cernere suave est.

There is a tradition, not authentic, that at the close of Selden's life he wished he had been a justice of the peace, and in that humble way useful to his neighbours. He would certainly have been the wisest justice on the banks of Trent, or Thames. Such wishes are not to be taken seriously. But Selden might have had a great career as a sagacious statesman, guiding the counsels and moderating the zeal of the Parliamentary party. He deliberately turned from what became in his eyes a vulgar brawl. The 'great refusal' has never been

made with more dignity. Selden retained the respect of his old colleagues, and his funeral in the Temple Church was attended by the judges of the land. He died, as he had lived, plain John Selden, while his intellectual inferiors filled high offices of State. He wanted a quiet life; he got it, and he paid for it. He has painted the situation in a quaint allegory:

> Wise men say nothing in dangerous times. The lion, you know, called the sheep to ask her if his breath smelt; she said aye; he bit off her head for a fool. He called a wolf and asked him; he said no; he tore him in pieces for a flatterer. At last he called the fox and asked him. Truly he had got a cold and could not smell.

Selden's cold was chronic. During the period of these conversations the last civil war in England (except Monmouth's trumpery rebellion) was waged, Charles the First was executed, Oliver Cromwell became Protector of the realm. But to none of these events is there the smallest allusion in the talk of Selden's table. Such silence in private is amazing, and of course we do not know how much the secretary suppressed. But one can imagine that Selden, having definitely abandoned public life, would not care for such a pale simulacrum of it as talking politics with his friends. He had filled a great place, and there is nothing less dignified than a partial retirement; or it may be that men of very different opinions came to his house, and that to content them all he adopted a cleanlier shift than Sir Robert Walpole's by talking of universal truths. Posterity would be ungrateful to quarrel with the result. Except Bacon's Essays there is hardly so rich a treasure-house of worldly wisdom in the English language as Selden's *Table Talk*. Some of it, indeed, is thoroughly Baconian, as 'Wit and wisdom differ; wit is upon the sudden turn, wisdom is in bringing about ends.' But most of it is entirely his own, the mature thought of a princely intellect equally

at home in the book of the world and in the world of books. Johnson compared it with French collections of *ana*, such as the *Menagiana*, but it is intensely and characteristically English. Although Selden asks, 'Is there not enough to meddle withal upon the stage, or in love, or at the table, but religion?' religion was seldom out of his thoughts. He considered it as a statesman, not as a pietist, but he recognised its all-pervading influence on human affairs. An Erastian of the Erastians he was no materialist, like his friend Hobbes. He was indeed a typical Church of England man, as far removed from Geneva as from Rome. He did not shrink from the free handling of sacred subjects, and there was an element of brutality in some of his sledge-hammer attacks on current superstition. But if he had been the scoffing sceptic that some in fear of his knowledge dubbed him, so saintly a man as Sir Matthew Hale could not have called him a resolved, serious Christian. Coleridge complained of the lack of poetry in Selden, and this complaint is just. He was too much under the influence of reason, he had little or no imagination, and he underrated the force of sentiment, religious or otherwise. The ridiculous aspect of things struck him so forcibly that it sometimes blinded him to their graver significance. Every man has his limitations, and these were his. But those who know best what good talk is will be the readiest to admire the incomparable excellence of Selden's.

*April*, 1900.

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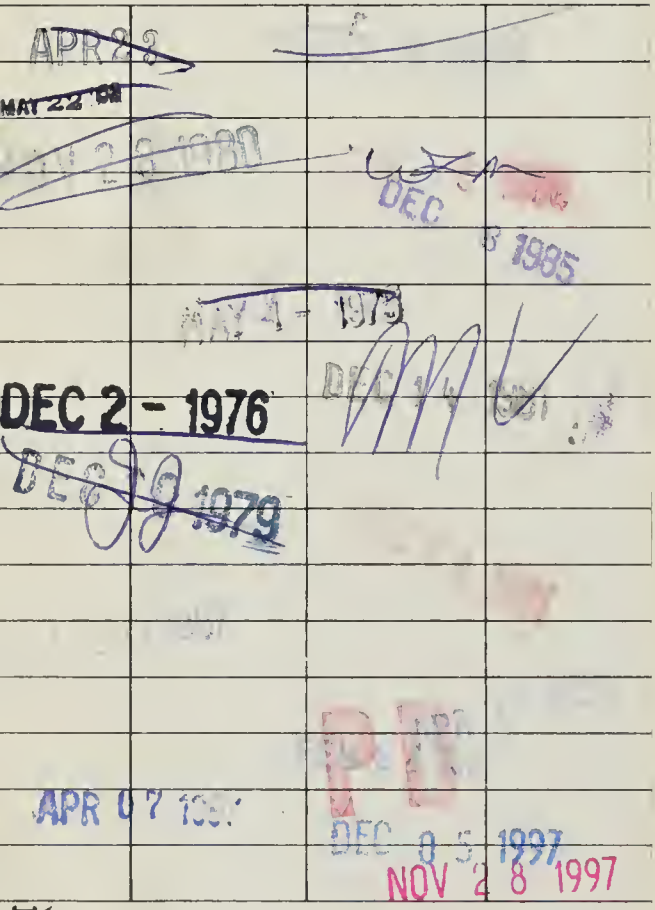


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